

Fall 2020/5781

Congregation Etz Chaim**Inside this issue:**

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High Holidays 2020

by Cantor Beth Strassler

It is the *people* who make Congregation Etz Chaim a special place. Being with people is a big reason why we all look forward to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the synagogue: to catch up after the summer hiatus, meet new community members, see how we each have changed, or the children have grown. We gather and stand together to observe an ancient tradition that encourages each of us to be a better person in the year ahead.

The observance will happen this year. The format will be different: You will be able to participate from your own home. I am sure you will miss sitting amidst the beauty of our synagogue sanctuary, but, we still have each other.

Many people will contribute to the service by performing aliyahs, or leading readings from home. Alan Fink will continue his tradition of chanting the High Holiday Torah portions...from his home. Jack Schraeter will continue to call people to the Torah and call the shofar blasts... from his home. The haftarahs will be chanted by several community members...each from her own home.

David and I will be leading the services from the sanctuary, despite your absence. The new audio system will make the sound clear and bright. The new camera will provide a wider view of the Ark and bimah than our laptop camera could ever do. You will have a good sense of sitting in the synagogue with our new equipment.

As you know, Congregation Etz Chaim activities have been online since the middle of March. We have been amazed at the high level of personal and spiritual connection that people report when they go online for our services, Torah Study or Hebrew School. The Teen Class and the Women's Book Group have also successfully used the online format to keep strong connections among group members.

Just as it is not possible to successfully present a book as a movie without a screenplay, it is not possible to take an in-person High Holiday service and "just move" it online. It takes a different configuration of content, systems and length to offer a meaningful online experience. We have been honing the process since March.

An amazing outpouring of thoughtfulness, work, creative thinking, energy, and love is energizing our synagogue leaders to prepare for the upcoming holidays. Many hours and some dollars have been invested to provide you with the most meaningful High Holiday experience possible under the present conditions. Our leaders have exemplified what former President John F. Kennedy once said (sort of):

"Ask not what your synagogue community can do for you, but what you can do for your synagogue community."

Congregation Etz Chaim
High Holiday Services Schedule 5781 Fall 2020
 www.etzchaimme.org

ALL SERVICES WILL BE ONLINE ONLY led by
 Cantor Beth Strassler & David Strassler from the sanctuary.



ROSH HASHANAH DAY 1: Fri, Sept 18: 6:45 pm

Sat, Sept 19: Prelim: 9:15; Morning: 9:30; Torah: 10:15
 Hineni & Musaf: 11; Ends by 11:30.
 No shofar due to Shabbat.

ROSH HASHANAH DAY 2: Sun Sept 20: Prelim: 9:15

Morning: 9:30; Torah & **Shofar Service: 10:15**
 Hineni & Musaf: 11:15. Ends by noon.

YOM KIPPUR: Sun, Sept 27: Kol Nidre: 6:15 pm

Mon, Sept 28: Prelim: 9:15; Morning: 9:30;
 Torah: 10:15; **Yizkor: 10:45**
 Hineni & Musaf: 11; Ends by noon.

Afternoon: 5 pm; **Neilah: 6 pm**
6:30: Break the Fast Together online

- IF you need help getting online. We offer tutorials.
- IF you need to borrow a prayerbook (aqua color)
- To be certain we have your contact phone or email to send you the link for the services.
- IF you have any other questions about the services.

Contact Cantor Strassler
 before the service dates

mail@etzchaimme.org
 OR 967-5833

Tashlich at the Saco River:
Pre-event sign up required—
sign up via email to:
strassler@roadrunner.com



The entire Leadership at Congregation
 Etz Chaim in Biddeford, ME wishes you
 and your family a year of safety,
 good health, happiness and prosperity.

2020 CEC High Holidays Check List

What you need to participate & Where to get it

1. Ability to connect to ZOOM online: Need help? Call Beth.
2. Schedule of Services: synagogue website
3. Link for services: synagogue email & website
4. **Aqua prayerbook: Not signed up to borrow one? Call Beth**
5. Yom Kippur Yizkor Service Booklet: If you are signed up to borrow a prayerbook, you will get one. If not, call Beth.
6. Schedule for Tashlich on Sun, Sept 20: Sign up with David at
strassler@roadrunner.com
7. Times for curbside book pickup: synagogue email & website

Cantor Beth Strassler: 967-5833
 www.etzchaimme.org



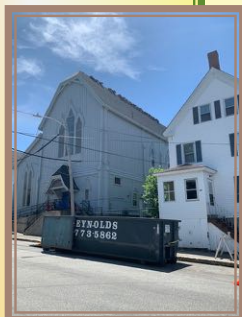
Welcome to the Board, Elyse Oliver!

by Jeff Levy

This past month, we welcomed Elyse Oliver as the newest member of Etz Chaim's Board of Directors. Elyse knows Etz Chaim well, having grown up in Biddeford and attended Hebrew School (through her Bat Mitzvah). She and her family, altogether, have been members of Etz Chaim for over 15 years, including the 10 years during which her mother, Pamela Small Oliver, served on the Board.

Elyse has accumulated a wide range of experience, and we are thrilled to have her join us and help contribute to the Etz Chaim community. Elyse has volunteered with many Biddeford-based organizations, including Heart of Biddeford and the Biddeford Mills Museum. For four years, Elyse was also an active member of her college Hillel, an international student organization dedicated to fostering inclusive Jewish life on college campuses. Currently, Elyse supports nonprofit, government, and philanthropic leaders in her role at Bennett Midland LLC, a civic sector consulting firm based in New York City. Her work at Bennett Midland has included designing and leading strategic planning workshops for an NYC-based homeless services organization, coaching city employees in Austin, TX and Anchorage, AK to integrate human-centered design into their work, and examining the field of refugee law, to help refugee legal advocates think through how to strengthen their operations. With these experiences in hand, Elyse will bring additional expertise in strategy development, and youth engagement, to our exceptional Board.

In her spare time, Elyse enjoys playing jazz, running, and learning by listening to new perspectives. Please join me in welcoming Elyse Oliver to the Etz Chaim Board of Directors!



Synagogue Roof

by Jeff Levy

Yet another milestone for our synagogue - we have a brand new roof! The wear and tear on our roof became evident over the past year, indicating it was time to replace it. Ours is an exceptionally difficult roof to replace, due to the steepness, and the lack of access on either side.

Most of the roofers we called for estimates declined the job, based on the difficulty that the job posed. We ultimately got three bids for the project, and settled on Rich Exterior Solutions, a company with many positive references, and they have completed roofing jobs for some churches in southern Maine with a similar roof line.

The cost of replacing the roof was a necessary expenditure for our synagogue, but painful, none the less. When Suzi Osher heard about how the cost of the roof impacted our budget, she made a very generous donation to cover the cost entirely. Our most sincere THANK YOU, Suzi!



An Interview with Joyce Hollman

by Cantor Strassler and Cynthia Kurtz

We will have the opportunity to hear the *entire* Jonah haftarah during the Yom Kippur afternoon service this year. It is a *long* one. Why are we not making it shorter? Because Joyce Hollman knows it in its entirety, and because last year she did not have the chance to complete it when Yom Kippur came on October 9th.

As many of you know, she had just gotten home on October 4, after having brain surgery to remove a benign tumor, and a hospital stay, including extensive rehab. She had been taken by ambulance to the hospital on the day after Labor Day, Tuesday, September 3rd. Needless to say, she did not have the strength to stand and chant Jonah for the required 20-25 minutes, but no one was going to keep her away from the synagogue that day. She amazed us all by coming and completing the whole first page!

Since that time, we have witnessed the incredible accomplishment of her recovery. It all began a month earlier when her son, Beniam, found her unresponsive in the morning. She spent September in the hospital, determined to take all the steps necessary for a full recovery. She has inspired all of us.

Joyce often remarks that her incident was much harder on her loved ones than on herself. "I really don't know what happened," she says. "I did not have the mental capacity to deal with all of it. I simply trusted the health professionals who told me what I need to do, and I worked hard to complete all the steps. They told me I would get better and I believed them."

Her single-minded determination and persistence has been an inspiration to all of us throughout the past year. Yes, she had good days and bad days, and it was difficult, but she always believed that she would fully recover.

Joyce is the first one to say that the experience taught her that life is truly unpredictable. "We think that everything in life will go in a straight line, but in reality, we don't know what will happen next. Life can be very strange." She is a self-professed "reforming control freak". She often reflects "It happened the way it was supposed to happen. There could have been nobody home, or I could have been driving a car! My surgeon told me much later that my son being home, and finding me when he did, saved my life."

Her latest victory is that she has donated her walkers to someone else who needs them; she no longer does.

She eagerly looks forward to the day when she is able to hug people! "I became a hugger when I felt all of the love that was shown to me and my family while I was hospitalized. Now, it is extremely difficult to not touch others." Joyce has not seen many important people in her life since last August. "First," she says, "I was not traveling because I was in recovery. Then COVID came along. Perhaps now I am better prepared to deal with the uncertainty of not knowing when things with COVID will be better."

Joyce chooses to focus on what she *can* control in uncertain times. She is presently committed to making three phone calls a day to help friends to understand the voting process: "Did you know that you can vote early in the state of Maine? I am not talking about absentee ballots, I am talking about in-person voting at your town hall." So please vote, everyone! It's a right and a privilege, and it's important.



Cantor's Corner

by Cantor Beth Strassler

Several community members are featured in this newsletter. You could say they are “special” people. However, each and every one of you are special. You are each created in the image of God, and there are multiple sides to that image.

A few weeks ago, our Torah study group discussed one of the parshot, in which God tells Moses to count the people in the desert. There are several recorded “countings” of the Jews in the desert. Rashi explains “Because the children of Israel are special to Him, God counts them often.” We learned that each time there is a census taken, it is because God loves to count God’s people.

However, in parsha Bamidbar, we find a strange phrase for the counting: There are several verbs & phrases in Hebrew that convey the meaning of “counting”, why choose this one?

One of my favorite commentators, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, explains:

“God tells Moses that there is a danger, when counting a nation, that each individual will feel insignificant. “What am I? What difference can I make? I am only one of millions, a mere wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea-shore, dust on the surface of infinity.”

To counteract this, God instructs Moses to count the people by “se’u et rosh”, literally “lift the head”. To lift one’s head means to show favor, to value someone. It recognizes each person as an individual with unique thoughts, unique abilities and gifts. Think about it: What did Moses have to do to lift each head? He stood in front of each person, close enough to be able to reach out and lift the chin until their eyes met. I think what happened next is that each one smiled.

The high holiday services are a time to be counted by “se’u et rosh”. May you feel God lift your head, look you in the eye and recognize your unique self. It will make God smile.

The Making of High Holiday Services 2020

by Jeff Levy

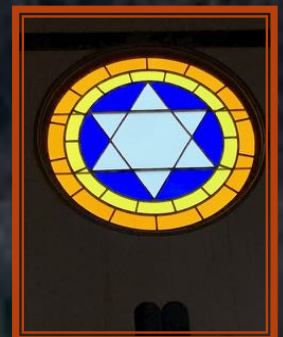
Every year, the ritual committee of Etz Chaim synagogue meets regularly, prior to Rosh Hashanah, to plan our High Holiday services, which are intended to provide a meaningful, enriching experience for our congregants. This year, in the midst of a pandemic, the planning of our services has taken on a much higher degree of complexity. Our goal, however, is the same, to provide our congregants with the opportunity to have meaningful and enriching experiences, as they celebrate in the safety of their own homes.

A High Holiday Subcommittee was formed, to work in conjunction with the existing Ritual Committee (Alan Fink, David Strassler, Cantor Beth Strassler, Lynne DeSantis and Dr. Morton Gold). The HH Subcommittee is led by Leah Macomber, and is staffed by Julie Campisi, Maureen King, Jack Schraeter and Jeff Levy. We were charged with making the services accessible to our community at large, determining the logistics of creating a virtual experience that allows Cantor Beth Strassler and David Strassler to lead services from the synagogue, while other members of our community participate remotely with Torah and Haftarah readings, Aliyot, and providing music to enhance the experience. The committee surveyed our membership to gain insight into what each member will need to be able to enjoy the services. There are systems being set up to help people get their prayer book, and there is a plan to help those members who need some technical support to prepare as well.

Gaining the knowledge and technology necessary to run the High Holiday Services in a Webinar format may sound like an overwhelming task...and it certainly could have been. But our synagogue was fortunate to be introduced to Richard Mariello, who has worked tirelessly with our team. Richard is a member of Grace Point Church in Biddeford, and had set up their webinar system. I've learned that Richard had done two tours in Afghanistan with the Army, and has two purple hearts. He is a father of eight children, five of them adopted. He is a teacher in a Christian School in Rochester, NH. Richard stated that it is his belief that we all pray to the same G-d, and he feels very good about helping our synagogue provide meaningful services to our congregation. Richard was clear that he was not interested in getting paid, although we have agreed to make a donation to Grace Point Church, in his honor, to express our gratitude for his aid.

Joe Strassler has agreed to be the "technical host" for our services, and will be skillfully orchestrating who we will be seeing on the live stream for our services. During the build up to our High Holiday services, we are testing our new equipment, and practicing using our technology. Joe has been working with our subcommittee, and has been training himself on the skills that will be needed to keep the services running smoothly from a technical standpoint.

These are unprecedented times, and we believe that Etz Chaim Synagogue has had, and will have, an important role to play in our spiritual health. Rest assured, our Ritual Committee and our High Holiday Subcommittee, are committed to ensuring our community will have access to meaningful programming during the Days of Awe and throughout the year.



Help Fill Our Cookbook!

by Maureen King

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library is putting together a special cookbook, filled with your favorite Congregation Etz Chaim recipes! Monies raised from sales of the completed cookbook will benefit the Library fund for books and materials.

Recipes are being collected NOW! Share your favorite High Holiday recipe, or your Shabbat go-to, or your family's best dessert. The cookbook will feature many potluck favorites from over the years, including the famous Etz Chaim challah recipe and Marc's famous latkes, along with family heirlooms collected from congregation members and friends. Our goal is to have 300 recipes so please share yours!

You can share your recipes with the Library Committee either by sending us a recipe by mail (P. O. Box 905, Kennebunk, ME 04043) or by email (library@etzchaimme.org or somlibrary-maine@gmail.com). We hope you will share a brief history of the recipe or a dedication to the person who created it or made it special for your family.

You can also share a recipe by going online to www.typensave.com. Our username is Library Etz Chaim and the password to contribute recipes is [blender220](#).

And of course, if you'd like to help put the cookbook together, please reach out to the Library Committee at somlibrarymaine@gmail.com or library@etzchaimme.org or call 207-282-2907 and leave a message.

Tashlich in the Park: By Appointment Only

This Rosh Hashanah, Tashlich is celebrated on the second day, instead of the first day, due to the first day being on Shabbat.

And due to the Pandemic, our ritual of walking down to the Saco River, after the morning service, will not be happening.

Instead, on Sunday afternoon, September 20th, I will lead the Tashlich Ceremony at Mechanics Park, Biddeford (better known to the Congregation Etz Chaim members as Tashlich Park). We will read prayers, and then you will be able to cast your bread crumbs (sins) into the Saco River.

I will walk groups of 10 down, starting at 2 pm. Please send an email, including the number of family members to sign up, to: strassler@roadrunner.com

Get connected with the Challah Challenge!

by Leah Macomber

A few weeks ago my awesome 8-yr-old niece Addie Hargrave in Encinitas, California, sent me a video challenge. A challah challenge! She sent the message to me and my 3 sisters, my mom, and a few other family members to bake a challah for Shabbat and send her photos of the process and product, for her judging. I thought it was such a sweet idea, but I could not have imagined the impact it had on me and my family, as it all came together that Friday. I'm someone who absolutely loves Shabbat. I get excited to end the work week with gratitude and celebration, and though I admit I don't relax on Shabbat, or bake challah regularly, I definitely thank God for a wonderful life. No matter what, it is truly wonderful.

That said, I don't have a good track record with challah baking. My challahs often fail to rise. I once accidentally used way too much salt. Or was it not enough, I don't recall. If I bake a challah, I am usually braiding during intense conference calls so anything goes. And if you must know, I eat a strict gluten-free diet, which means it is a labor of love, but all I can enjoy is that delicious smell, and all I can hope for is that it looks good and the rest of the family devour it, and smile. But Addie gave me a challenge, and since I love Addie, and I am a sucker for a challenge, I went right to it.

I set my dough for it's first rise at about 8am EST, and sent my photo to Addie and the group. My family on the west coast were still sleeping, but when they woke up a few hours later, I received so many messages and photos - it was "Game On!" One sister in Arizona showed her dough while she was working out. One sister and another niece in California showed their dough an hour later. My dough was on it's second rise, so I showed off just to keep them going. By then, in Maine, it was just after noon before Shabbat, and as the messages and pictures came in, I was overwhelmed with enthusiasm to win this challenge, but more importantly, my enthusiasm for Shabbat skyrocketed.

As the day went on, and my challah was braided and rising again, I couldn't help feeling connected to the Jewish world. Something so simple as making a challah tore down the walls of pandemic isolation, and created an immediate connection with my sisters and my faith. I was on pins and needles all day, hoping my challah would continue to rise to the challenge.

When my day of work was done, and I peeked at my braided concoction, I couldn't believe my **eyes**, that my third rise had succeeded! I delicately brushed it with egg, decorated it with poppy, sesame and everything spice, and popped it in the oven. It baked to perfection!
(Continued on next page.)



Get connected with the Challah Challenge! (cont.)

Because we had this amazing challah, the rest of the night was extra celebratory. The meal was prepared with additional care, the candles were set on the outside deck. The challah was baked, just as the sun was setting, and all of us, even my kids, were excited! Like no other Shabbat during the pandemic, we felt amazingly connected.

We celebrated Shabbat, and as the sun set across the country, my family celebrated Shabbat too. They shared photos of their challahs, their bruchas and their gratitude - it was great!!!

So I'd like to take Addie's challenge to you, Etz Chaim! YOU are now challenged to bake (or somehow get) a challah for Shabbat! We have created a Facebook event preceding the October Friday night Shabbat service for your enthusiasm!!! So get online and post your photos - from morning until sundown, when we celebrate with gratitude!!!! Our online Shabbat service will feature your photos! Post recipes or bakeries, successes or fails, no matter where you are, let's get connected!! ***Game On, Etz Chaim! Time to bake!!***

Samuel Osher Memorial Library

by Maureen King

The Library is not open to the public...yet. BUT you can still borrow books!
Email Maureen somlibrarymaine@gmail.com with your book requests.

The Library will let you know when your choice is ready (if we have it).
And we will arrange for a curbside pickup, maybe a delivery, or even mail.

L'Shanah Tovah Tikateyvu!! And happy reading!

From the Samuel Osher Memorial Library

2020 Census by Maureen King

[Responding to the Census](#)

Please remember to fill out your Census form! You can go online to fill out the form, fill out the paper form, or respond via phone. The data gathered is very important for our communities for the next decade. Funding and support for services range across roads, bridges, transportation, hospitals, schools, housing, ports, schools, early childhood services, and disaster relief. Thanks for doing your part to support your community!

Fill out a census form here: <https://my2020census.gov/>

For more information: <https://2020census.gov/en/ways-to-respond.html>

Congregation Etz Chaim Scholarship

Awarded to: Isabella Hammond



The following is the essay submitted by Isabella Hammond in 2020, the fourth recipient of the Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award:

I have been a part of Congregation Etz Chaim for as long as I can remember. From ages 5 to 16 I had been going to Hebrew School consistently, and this past year I have been helping teach whenever I could. Hebrew School and Congregation Etz Chaim have made a huge impact on my life. From the countless community service projects to putting on the Purim play, I am deeply grateful for the memories, friends, and knowledge this synagogue has given me.

This year, however, has been one of my favorites because I got to teach the Aleph Class and help out wherever needed. I am proud to be able to help them grow and I learned how much I enjoyed teaching. When we all discussed as a group how the stories we were learning about correspond to real-world problems and events, I can see how having common conversations can make a difference in our community. This is what I love about having a community I can rely on, even when times are hard. I knew that every week I could go to Hebrew School and see people that I can be myself with and embrace my Jewish heritage.

Learning about Jewish culture and teachings has given me a perspective on life that not a lot of my peers get. After High School, I will be attending the University of Maryland in College Park. I am majoring in physics and astronomy. Additionally, I was supposed to go on a Birth-right trip this year, but unfortunately, it was canceled. I plan to join a Hillel in college and further my connection to Judaism. I am very appreciative of my experience to have been a part of this Hebrew School and community. Thank you for your time!

The Congregation Etz Chaim Women's Book Group

by Maureen King

The Congregation Etz Chaim Women's Book Group meets monthly to discuss memoirs, novels, and nonfiction books by Jewish writers or with Jewish themes. Since April, like everyone else, we have been meeting via Zoom. Online meetings haven't hampered our discussions (and no one needs to drive around Bacon Street to find a parking space!). The Samuel Osher Memorial Library always has a copy of the current selection, and can organize a contactless pickup.

Our summer reading ranged from *Antisemitism: Here and Now* by Deborah E. Lipstadt, to *The Immortalists* by Chloe Benjamin, to *The Boston Girl* by Anita Diamant. The group chooses from a book list composed of member recommendations and library recommendations. We encourage members to attend, even if they haven't finished or didn't read the current book, as we learn interesting things from each other every time we meet.

Our next meeting dates and books are:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Thursday, September 10 | -- <i>The Book of Longings</i> by Sue Monk Kidd; |
| Thursday, October 8 | -- <i>The Last Bathing Beauty</i> by Amy Sue Nathan; |
| Thursday, November 12 | -- <i>The Spiral Shell: A French Village Reveals Its Secrets of Jewish Resistance in World War II</i> by Sandell Morse; |
| Wednesday, December 9 | -- <i>The Guest Book</i> by Sarah Blake. (This will be a pre-Hanukkah celebration!) |

Contact Susan Pierce at the_pierces@roadrunner.com or Maureen King at library@etzchaimme.org or somlibrarymaine@gmail.com for more information about the Women's Book Group meetings and how to participate. Join us for a Jewish reading adventure on Zoom!

Downstairs Re-Model...Again

by Linda Federman

A word or two about changes downstairs...the kitchen, Shapiro social hall & rest rooms.

After many years, it was decided to replace the kitchen flooring and cabinetry. The Shapiro room flooring had been replaced just a few years ago and the kitchen was definitely in need of "sprucing up". The kitchen floors, cabinets, countertops and island were finally in place.

Unfortunately, just as a new car often attracts dings and scratches, our improvements "attracted" a natural disaster...the flooding of last December. All of the lower level flooring was damaged beyond repair, and unusable for an extended period of time. Fortunately, all was covered by insurance, and we now have a second round of flooring in social hall, kitchen and restrooms.

All is in order now, ready for enjoyment whenever the Coronavirus pandemic is behind us. We look forward to exciting events in the near future.

Sweet Noodle Kugel Recipe

(from the Feldman family recipes)

8 oz. Noodles, broad or curly (your choice)
4 Eggs, separated
1 stick Butter or margarine
½ to ¾ cup Raisins (or other dried fruit of your choice, NOT candied fruit)
1 cup Cottage cheese
1 cup Sour cream
½ cup Sugar
2 tsp. Vanilla extract
2 tsp. Cinnamon
¼ cup Graham cracker crumbs (for topping)

Melt the butter or margarine in a small pan with the raisins (or dried fruit). Set aside.

Cook noodles to al dente, according to package directions. Drain and set aside.

Preheat oven to 350.

Butter an 8 x 8 pan or a 1-quart casserole dish.

Beat the egg whites to stiff peaks and set aside.

Combine the egg yolks, cottage cheese, sour cream, sugar, vanilla extract, and cinnamon.

Stir in the buttered fruit and noodles. Fold in the beaten egg whites.

Transfer to the buttered dish and sprinkle the graham cracker crumbs over the top.

Bake for about 45 minutes, or until golden brown on top.

Bella Cowan, Part II – Childhood Memories

by Ellie Rolnick

Bella grew up near a Polish Catholic neighborhood. She was beaten up by the kids on her way to school every day. The Catholic Church was close by. The nuns would do nothing about problems, but the priests were very kind to go to for advice. Bella felt she experienced overt anti-Semitism from these children. She started to wait to leave her house until the other kids had left for school, so they couldn't beat her up. Her father saw one day that she was not leaving for school and asked her why. After much prodding, she told him. He was furious, and spoke with the children, who never bothered Bella again. During this story, Bella recalls her father being 6'2" and was very commanding. She has no idea what he said to those children, but whatever it was, and however it was said, they stopped.

Bella's mother was 56 when she died. She had kidney disease, and had been ill and in bed for 2-3 years. Bella was the youngest and most expendable, so she would often miss school on Fridays so she could prepare for the Sabbath. It was more important that her older siblings be in school. Her mother would say in Yiddish 'Become a teacher an hour later'. Bella would make a complete Shabbat dinner with her mother telling her what to do. This is how she learned to cook without a cookbook; 'add a little of this, a pinch of that'. After she finished cooking, she would clean the whole house. Their house was kosher, and was maintained that way even after her mother passed. Recently, we learned that another one of Bella's duties on Friday morning was to go to the back yard, pick out a chicken to be slaughtered, take the chicken up the street to the Shochet (the slaughterer), pay him, and bring the chicken back home to be prepared.

Bella was 17 when her mother died. She had 4 older siblings married and out of the house, and 3 (including her) were still in the house. The day that Shiva ended was Bella's high school graduation. She walked to school by herself, stayed for the graduation, and walked back home. The rest of her family stayed at home. It was a very hard memory for her to talk about, as she was so close to her mother.

Bella referred to her father being very Avant Guard. He believed that all his daughters should have the same education as his sons. Her 3 brothers would have Hebrew lessons from a man who would come to their house. Bella and her sisters attended Hebrew School every day after regular school and on Sundays. The brothers all had a Bar Mitzvah ceremony at the shul, and a kaddish after the service, while the sisters had no recognition for what they had learned.

There were a couple other girls in Hebrew School, but mostly boys. In Hebrew School, they studied the Shulchan Aruch – a book on how to live a Jewish life. Hebrew School teachers would travel from Boston. Most would not last a year, because it was such a small community. The leaders of the community would often make their lives miserable. She doesn't remember any of them lasting more than a year. She mentions that in 1965, the first Bat Mitzvah in Bangor was held. My cousin Bette (Rudnick) Novick and 3 other girls were Bat Mitvahed together. Bella recalls that their mothers each had a small reception for the girls, but there were no big celebrations. My own Bat Mitzvah in 1969 in Bangor was with 6 other girls. We each had a short speech to read. We did not get to read from the Torah. We had a combined party for the 7 of us – no adults, just a few of our friends, and a small 3 piece combo featuring Scott Rappaport (the former Cantor at congregation Etz Chaim). Bella took great pride in helping me with my speech. Looking back, after learning this part of her own history, I had a better understanding of why it was so important to her.

Bella Cowan, Part II – Childhood Memories (cont.)

There were 3 synagogues in Bangor. I believe there were only 2 when she was a child. There was the 'big shul', Congregation Beth Israel, a large 'modern' building on York Street (not far from where she lived). This was the conservative synagogue. There was a small orthodox shul on the bottom of Carr Street hill. Bella's father was very involved in this shul, until he had a falling out with someone there, then became a member of Beth Israel. She doesn't recall what the conflict was about, but that 'everyone has their own opinions. If you don't agree with them, build your own shul!'. She noted that, even today, many people have left the Temple in Portland to switch to other congregations for one reason or another. (Continued on next page.)

When she was about 8 years old, she left her house to go to school, and at the bottom of the hill, the shul was in flames. Men were rushing in and out of the building with Torahs and whatever else could be salvaged. Soon, a new 'little shul', Congregation Beth Abraham, was built across the street from Beth Israel. She spoke of an ultraorthodox shul on the corner, referred to as the 'Hoochy, coochy shul'. I recall that there was a reform shul in Bangor when I was a teenager, but don't recall anything about the 'Hoochy, Coochy'!

Bella related that the German Jewish Community was very well off, and they came to America for the opportunities. The German Jews always felt they were above the rest. They took it upon themselves to take care of the Eastern European Jews, but they wouldn't have anything to do with them. There was a small Jewish community in Rumford, Maine. Bella's sister Mildred married Harold Nelson, who had grown up there. There was a German family living there, and they built their own shul so they wouldn't have to interact with the non-German Jews.

Although Bella's parents did not assimilate into the American culture, speaking English was very important to Osher. Both he and his wife learned to speak English. Osher took night classes to learn. The teacher seemed to not want to help her students, but rather sit at her desk and read trashy magazines. Osher threatened to tell the principal what she was doing, as he wanted to learn. The teacher then helped him! Bella says that if her father could use a 2 syllable English word instead of a 1 syllable word, he would do it! He loved the English language.

Bella's parents spoke Yiddish in the house, often so the children wouldn't understand them. Bella was bright and curious, and she would sit, listen and learn. Large groups of women would often congregate around her mother, gossiping and discussing the latest news. Bella was the youngest and home alone with her mom while her siblings were at school, so she would also learn from listening to the women chatter. Her father received a newspaper called 'Yiddish News' and would teach her how to read and translate it. Bella loved to speak Yiddish, and enjoyed the friends she made, as an adult, who could converse in Yiddish with her.

The next installment will focus on Bella's college and early work experience, and what caused her to move from Bangor to Biddeford-Saco.

Jewish Literacy Project

By David Strassler

In 2009, I was acutely aware that some of our Hebrew School families had very few books in their house that were connected to Judaism. With the generous support of the Samuel L. Cohen Foundation, I started the Jewish Literacy Project for our Hebrew School families. Each family would receive 2-3 books at the end of the school year to add to their home library. Recommendations were made from the education committee. I thought this would be a good time to share this list with our Jewish community, as some of us have more time to read these days, or are just looking for a good book to read. Our library, the Samuel Osher Memorial Library, has these books on its shelves. If you are interested in taking one out, contact Maureen King, our librarian: somlibrarymaine@gmail.com

The Art Of Jewish Cooking by Jennie Grossinger

The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living by Daniel Syme

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee by Wendy Mogel, Ph. D.

G-d's To-Do List by Dr. Ron Wolfson

A Family Book of Midrash by Barbara Diamond Goldin

To Life by Harold Kushner

Stories For Children-Isaac Beshevis Singer

The Family Treasury of the Jewish Holidays by Malka Drucker

Day After Night by Anita Diamant

Miriam's Kitchen by Elizabeth Ehrlich

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Jewish Literacy by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks

Why the Jews by Dennis Prager & Joseph Telushkin

The Book of Job. When Bad Things Happen to a Good Person by Harold Kushner

Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film by Glenn Kurtz

Jewish Humor by Joseph Telushkin

Antisemitism: Here and Now by Deborah E. Lipstadt

Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul by Jack Canfield et al

The Misadventures of Rabbi Kibbitz and Mrs. Chaipul by Mark Binder

If All the Seas Were Ink by Ilana Kurshan

Not in G-d's Name-confronting Religious Violence

Code of Jewish Ethics by Joseph Telushkin

Beneath a Scarlet Sky by Mark Sullivan

The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit by Lucette Lagnado

Tevye The Dairyman and The Railroad Stories by Sholem Aleichem

The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven by Dr. Ron Wolfson

When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Lemonade

By David Strassler

When Beth and I returned from Israel this past January, we were getting excited to go back in June to celebrate a cousin's Bar Mitzvah. Beth was going to help lead the service *in Israel*! Our three adult children planned to join us. I already had a two week vacation approved and we decided to expand the trip to include our first visit to Poland, to see where my parents were raised. Then the Pandemic arrived, and there went our trip.

In May, as I was trying to decide whether to forego my vacation, I decided to see what else might be available. Seven years ago, Beth and I completed a two week Hebrew Immersion Program at Middlebury College in Vermont, through their highly regarded Summer Language Program. On the internet, I found out that they were offering a three week Hebrew Immersion class on-line, for "Life Long Learners". (No need to compare memorizing abilities with twenty year old classmates.) I called...they still had openings...we applied...we were accepted. And before we knew it, we had new plans for the first part of the summer. I must note that Beth convinced me to take an extra week off from work (which my job was able to accommodate).

Prior to the course, we took a pretest and placed in the intermediate program. We asked to be in the same class, so we could do homework together (so romantic!). Having done the program before, we knew we were in for an intense three weeks. We signed a language pledge to only speak, read, talk and listen to Hebrew, as best we could, living in the "real world". It was much easier to do that on campus in Vermont, where we were insulated from the outside world.

We had ZOOM classes for three hours a day, with homework to follow. We had a wonderful teacher (Aliza Brosh), who lives in Newton, Massachusetts, and two other students-Barbara from Manhattan and Bonnie from Virginia. When we weren't in class, Beth and I conversed in Hebrew, correcting each other as we were able. We watched a lot of Hebrew movies (with English sub-titles) and played Hebrew scrabble.

I found that, during my morning bike rides, I was thinking about Hebrew words and expressions. I used that time to finally learn all the Hebrew months in order (to the tune of Frere Jacques). And my garden never looked so good.

By the end of the 3 weeks, our vocabulary was better, and we were able to converse easier. I am now better able to read Hebrew without vowels, and understand what I am reading. We are both able to understand more in conversation (as long as the other person is not talking too fast).

As soon as we're able, we will travel back to Israel, and finally get to Poland.



A Journey of Faith in the Time of Coronavirus

by Jack Schraeter

It was late February, 2020, and I have traveled to the city of Salalah, in the governorate of Dhofar, located in Western Oman, about 150 miles from the border of Yemen, and located right on the Persian Gulf. Why was I there?

It was in the late summer of 2019, and it was one of the hottest on record in the Arabian Peninsula, with temperatures over 53C (127F) and I had just left Saudi Arabia. I was in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, on my way to the airport. I had a flight scheduled to Muscat, Oman and onwards to Salalah. For reasons that have no explanation, the flight to Muscat was cancelled, and there were no others for two days. So the whole trip was a wash, I had a wasted day in Abu Dhabi, I had to reset my schedule, and I went on the next day to Manama, Bahrain. The cancellation was a disappointment, as for 3 years I had tried to plan this stop in Salalah, and I wondered in the back of my mind, if the “forces of disarray” were working against me.

So, here I am again, now in late February, 2020, and back at the airport in Abu Dhabi for a flight scheduled to Muscat, Oman and onwards to Salalah. This time the flight took off, and 6 hours later, I was in Salalah and arrived at a seaside hotel at 11:30 that evening. Covid-19 was in the early stage of rearing its ugly head, and within days, we knew about the outbreak in Iran and the rapid spread of the virus throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and into Europe. It was now a race against time to accomplish why I came to Salalah, and to find my way out of the region and back home to Maine. How I got home is a tale unto itself, for another time.

So why Salalah, which is so off the beaten track and so close to a war zone and why would I be there. Here is why: I have always been fascinated by the burial tombs and mausoleums (Ohel) of the Patriarchs and the Prophets and other biblical figures, along with famous Rabbis and scholars. Of all of the lands and places mentioned in the Bible, none is so far off the beaten path as distant Oman. More than a thousand miles away from the Eretz Yisroel, across rugged mountains and nearly impassable deserts, Salalah lays claim to a site that could be the oldest of the Abrahamic tradition: The homeland of the Prophet Job. Yet for all of its improbabilities that Job came from this distant land is strangely supported by certain facts of history and geography. The tradition of Job being a native of southeastern Arabia dates back several thousand years, and no other place claims this enigmatic Biblical figure as its own. About 40 miles northwest of Salalah, way up in the mountains, is his tomb. The final resting place for this biblical figure is the furthest tomb/burial site from Jerusalem than any other: 1,560 miles.

The actual tomb is located on a hill known as Jabal Al Qar. Jabal Al Qar consists of a small ridge that dominates a desolate, rocky terrain, broken up here and there by spots of grass and frankincense trees. On the winding, narrow roads (with no guardrails for protection from falling off a cliff) up from the city, you see only small, scattered farms, with camels and donkeys grazing. A circular wall surrounds the compound, which includes the Ohel, containing the tomb as well as a mosque. Job is a prophet to Muslims as well, and his tale in Islam is as close to that of the Hebrew bible as you can get.

The mosque is a relatively simple affair, with a low, flat roof and a single minaret. The Tomb is even smaller, perhaps the size of a very small house, with a dome over the center. Inside, beneath the dome, is a rectangular opening in the floor containing the tomb of the prophet Job. The tomb is little more than a mound of dirt, normally draped in cloth. According to Muslim tradition, another body is buried within the tomb next to Job. It is not known whose body it is. (Continued on next page.)

A Journey of Faith in the Time of Coronavirus (cont.)

Upon entering the Ohel, one had to remove one's shoes, and women must have their head covered. I decided this would be one place I would wear my Kippah that I brought with me. While I was there, a constant flow of people came in and out. There were a large number of Indian and Pakistani Muslims, some European Christians traveling in the area, and one Canadian couple from British Columbia. It is a custom of Muslims to sit along the stone walls by his grave, pray and work their prayer beads in their hands. The Europeans came in, stood around for a few moments and out they went. The Canadian couple were in a bit of awe at what they were seeing. I decided that this would be a good place to sit along the wall with the other Muslims, and use this as a time of meditation. Some folks asked me where I was from, and was I Israeli (Israel and Oman signed a peace accord with diplomatic relations and direct air travel in 2019, a crowning achievement of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, as he was near death at the time, and it was his last act of international acclaim before he died 2 months later). I said no, that I was from the States. We talked a bit about how Job is a figure that everyone from all religions should know about.

So, who was Job, what do we know about him, and what has our Talmud and Midrashim told us about him? Job, and the book about him, tell us of a wealthy and prosperous man who lived in Uz in the region of Edom, whose righteousness was tested by Satan with permission from God. The Talmud and the Midrashim tell us that he was the son Zare, one of the sons of Esau, and of his mother Bosorha, so that he was the fifth from Abraham. He reigned as a regional king in Edom. That would put him at the time the Israelites would already be slaves in Egypt.

The Talmud also tells us that Job was, in fact, one of three advisors that Pharaoh consulted, prior to acting against the increasingly multiplying Israelites in the Book of Exodus. As described in the Talmud: Balaam (the sorcerer) urged Pharaoh to kill the Hebrew new-born boys; Jethro (the priest of Midian and later, Moses' father in law) opposed this decree; and Job, though personally opposed to the decree, kept silent and did not protest it. It is for Job's silence that God allowed Satan to test him. And to the prophet Ezekiel, God refers to Job as a righteous man, of the same caliber as Noah and Daniel.

With that hint as to why God punishes Job, we get his book and what happened to him. Some even think it could be the oldest book in the entire Bible. The book opens up telling us about a wealthy, powerful, and righteous man named Job, with no real mention of anything else about him, or what has happened previously in his life. In what, we could say, was a roundtable of God and the angels, Satan (the Accuser) suggested that Job served God simply because God protected him. God removes Job's protection and gives permission to the angel to take his wealth, his children, and his physical health (but not his life). Despite his difficult circumstances, he does not curse God, but rather curses the day of his birth. And although he anguishes over his plight, he stops short of accusing God of injustice.

Upon hearing of what has happened to him, his friends come to him. They were Eliphaz, a descendant of Esau, king of the Thaanites, Bildad sovereign of the Sauchaeans, and Zophar, king of the Minaeans, and Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite. They argue whether it was justified, and they debate solutions to his problems. Job ultimately condemns all their counsel, beliefs, and critiques of him as false. God then appears to Job and his friends out of a whirlwind, not answering Job's central questions. Job, by staying silent before God, stresses the point that he understands that his affliction is God's will, even though he despairs at not knowing why. Job appears faithful without direct knowledge of God, and without demands for special attention from God, even for a cause that all others would declare to be just. God directly rebukes the three friends and gives them instructions for the remission of their sins, so that God does not have to act harshly toward them. Job is restored to prosperity, with twice as much as he had before; with seven sons and three daughters. He lived to a ripe old age, and saw four generations of descendants.

So, what is the meaning of Job's experience, and how does one explain the true reason for his suffering. This is the question of questions that has no direct answer. Some say that the message for all of us is that a righteous man cannot know why he suffers and the wicked prosper, because man's wisdom is not God's. God keeps his cosmic wisdom from human beings, giving us instead a "fear of God" as our own precious and proper concern. (Continued on next page.)

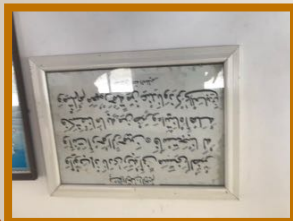
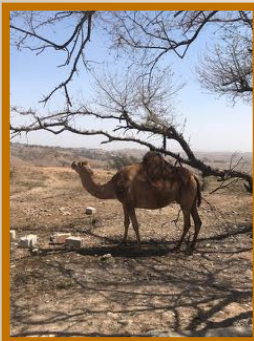
A Journey of Faith in the Time of Coronavirus (cont.)

Other theologians say that all of Job's past experience of God was as nothing compared with the experience he has now found. He therefore no longer cries out to God to be delivered from his suffering. He rests in God even in his pain. The book of Job can be seen as a psalm of lament, like Psalm 73, in which accusation and doubt are resolved by an experience of reaffirmed faith and trust. The book reaffirms Job's trust in God--and God's trust in Job. In teaching that piety must be unselfish and that the righteous sufferer is assured not of tangible reward but of fellowship with God. Biblical thought about justice, retribution, and providence reaches a climax--and a limit.

As we enter these High Holidays, we can be reminded of Job and the ultimate strength of his faith and in that, find our own.

L'shana Tova tTekatevu - May you be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life for a good year.

Jack's Photos



VOTE!

Election Day 2020 is coming!

Make your plan to vote--choose to vote in person or to vote absentee.

Check your voter registration and polling place; register if you are not registered.

If you choose to vote absentee in Maine, you can request your ballot from your town clerk or online at maine.gov; or for all states, online at <https://www.vote.org/absentee-ballot/>

If you vote absentee, remember to follow all directions and return your ballot as soon as possible. If you vote in person, plan your trip to the polling place.

For more information for Maine voters: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/voter-info/voterguide.html>

For general voting information: <https://www.usa.gov/voting> OR <https://www.vote411.org/>

Visit our website:
etzchaimme.org

Shabbat Services

*Dates and times can be found on the
Congregation Etz Chaim Web Site
calendar, as we are dealing with
Covid-19 and using Zoom to present
services.*

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York County (YC) Jewish Community Newsletter

This newsletter is published twice each year. It is intended to announce and report on Jewish community events in York County, and especially at Congregation Etz Chaim in Biddeford. It offers local perspectives on historical and contemporary aspects of Jewish life.

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Our Synagogue

Our community programs are available to all members of **the York County Jewish Community** and are driven by the following mission statement:

“We promote Jewish cultural, social, educational and religious activities in southern Maine. Our primary goal is to make available a range of activities that facilitate the expression of what each individual finds valuable in the Jewish experience.

We attempt to accommodate individuals along the entire spectrum of Jewish practice and theology. We value and support the existence of a local formal congregation, but view our community programs as open to all interested people, regardless of whether or to what congregation they may be formally affiliated.”

Synagogue Contacts

Please mail Membership dues to:

*PO Box 905,
Kennebunk, ME 04043*

Memorial Plaques, Prayer books,

Etz Chaim books of Torah:

Hebrew School/Services:

Shabbat Potlucks:

Library

David Strassler:

967-5833

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York County Jewish Community News



*Congregation Etz Chaim
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