

Spring 2021/5781

Congregation Etz Chaim



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Noah Hammond's Bar Mitzvah Project

By Noah Hammond

Hello, my name is Noah Hammond. You might have heard that I had my Bar Mitzvah last November. My Bar Mitzvah project was for an organization called Send a Smile Today. Send a Smile Today is a non profit that donates cards to people who are living with cancer all around the US. <https://sendasmiletoday.org/>

The main reason why I chose this organization was because I was researching for good community projects to do during Covid. This agency was asking for people to collect signed cards and donate them and they would send them to cancer patients. I wanted to volunteer for this organization because during Covid, this was a way to help people and also have no risks while doing it.

My original plan was that my whole family would help make cards and our goal would be at least 100 cards. Then I got the idea that I could put out a poster and send it on Facebook, asking other people to send us cards. We had low expectations on how many we would get from others. The response was incredible! The first person we met up with to collect her cards donated 100 cards! I realized that with the help of my community, I would get a lot more cards than expected. I wrote another email to send to my own Congregation. We kept getting emails from people asking how we could collect their cards. In the end we got exactly 922 cards, which was crazy!

One of my favorite responses was from my voice teacher, who also teaches at a middle school. She had all of her students make a hand drawn card, which resulted in almost another 100 cards! The organization said that would be about 3 months worth of cards that we helped provide them. So many people helped out and the organization emailed us themselves, and said all the cards we were sending in would help a ton, especially during such a tough time. They were so happy!

This felt like a very successful project and I appreciated the help I got from so many people in my community.



What Queen Esther Knew: Business Strategies from a Biblical Sage

Re-cap of the Zoom Presentation by the book's author, Connie Glaser. (Published by Rodale; 2008)

Sponsored by Congregation Etz Chaim with financial support from the Sam L Cohen Foundation

by Cantor Beth Strassler

What a privilege to hear the presentation by the book's author, Connie Glaser, on Feb 21! We were riveted to our computer screens, as Connie recounted the Purim story. She then offered insights to suggest that Esther, a mild mannered, young girl at the beginning of the story, became a savvy and successful business strategist, who brilliantly saved the Jewish people.

For those of us who grew up hearing that Esther became a mighty queen due to her physical beauty and desirability, Connie Glaser presented an alternate telling of the story. Connie traced the career of Esther: her evolution from a young girl living in the countryside, to a powerful queen, living in the capital city of Shushan, Persia.

How does it happen? Esther:

1. Recognized wise counsel. She decided to follow most (not all) of the advice of her Uncle. She learned all the beauty secrets from the palace staff, who prepared her for the contest. Her quest to be queen would have been short lived if she hadn't won the contest!
2. Knew the palace gossip. When her uncle told her that he overheard a secret plot to kill the King, she was able to inform the King and save his life.
3. Knew the palace protocols. She had studied not only the King's moods, but also the protocols for approaching him in the throne room. She set herself up to be successfully summoned by him. This queen would not be foolish enough to barge into the throne room uninvited!
4. Planned a home court advantage. By inviting the King and Haman to her place for feasting, she was on her own turf as she moved ahead with her plan.
5. Was patient. She knew she would not be effective if she simply blurted out her information, and was patient enough to (#6)
6. Waited for her "moments". Timing is everything. Esther proved that she understood this time and time again!

Author's Note:

It is a "commandment" for adults to get drunk during the holiday of Purim—so drunk that you cannot tell the difference between the name of the good guy (Mordecai) and the bad guy (Haman).

What a surprise that we could satisfactorily celebrate this holiday via Zoom, with both a modern re-telling of the Purim Story (Feb 21) and a Community Party (Feb 25), complete with a spiel from our Hebrew School students, as well as reciting the Congregation Etz Chaim Original Megillah, authored by Mike Berkowitz! We also have our IT Guru, Joe Strassler, to thank for his skills in making for a successful, *virtual* holiday celebration!

The Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award

By David Strassler

The Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award was created to honor Arnold Shapiro's commitment and service to Congregation Etz Chaim. Arnold Shapiro was raised in Biddeford and attended Hebrew School at Congregation Etz Chaim. He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in 1944. In 1980, Arnold Shapiro became the president of Congregation Etz Chaim, at a time when other Board members wanted to close the synagogue due to a lack of membership. He spent countless hours at Congregation Etz Chaim, doing everything from organizing High Holiday Services, to attending Bar and Bat Mitzvah services, recruiting volunteers, and supervising building repairs. For over 30 years, Arnold Shapiro unselfishly guided the congregation to the vibrant community it is today.

Goal: A scholarship will be awarded to a member of Congregation Etz Chaim who is a graduating high school senior, to support their post-secondary study in college, professional or trade school, or other post-secondary training or opportunities.

Amount: \$500-\$1,000.

When: The scholarship will be awarded annually in June. Please **submit your application by May 10, 2021.**

Eligibility: Graduating high school seniors who have been actively involved in providing service to the Congregation Etz Chaim community.

How: To fill out the application, go the web site: <http://etzchaimme.org/highschoolaward/>

All nominations will be reviewed, and the recipient will be chosen by a committee, comprised of the President of the Etz Chaim Board of Directors, one Board member, and an Education Committee member. The Scholarship is supported by the Shapiro Family.

Community Outreach Committee

By David Strassler

"The highest form of wisdom is kindness." – The Talmud, Brachot 17a.

We are in the process of formalizing a new committee at Congregation Etz Chaim: **The Community Outreach Committee**, chaired by Denise Hammond. Our goal is to show our love and care for each other in our Jewish Community. A few examples are:

1. Death in the family
2. Illness/Injury
3. Food insecurity
4. Damage to home

To share all that this committee will be doing, we will add a **Community Corner** to our newsletter!

This month, the Outreach Committee sent out three dinners, a bouquet of flowers for Shabbat and a beautiful gift basket to our Congregation Etz Chaim community. Highlighting how our Community can come together and help one another is a privilege, and something we will be highlighting more of!

Let us know what good news we can share for you!

If you see a **need or are interested** in being on this committee, contact Denise Hammond: dghammond@roadrunner.com.

Where has the Time Gone?

Submitted by Cantor Beth and Dr. David Strassler
to the Heart of Biddeford Facebook Page, February 2021

One of the criteria for our choosing Maine as a place to live was that it would need to have a Jewish community. We were so busy investigating jobs and housing, that we only did cursory research about the Jewish community. We checked off this box, as Biddeford had Congregation Etz Chaim.

On September 17, 1982 evening, we entered Congregation Etz Chaim for our first High Holiday service in Maine—the Rosh Hashanah evening service. We walked into the sanctuary and were immediately welcomed into the community. We were 28 years old, and the youngest of the 25 at that service was around 50 years old. No children were to be seen. This was obviously not a thriving Jewish community.

We felt duped. We realized that we did not complete our homework in understanding what this Jewish community was, which was fighting to survive.

Over the next few years, we attended services in Portland, where the Jewish community was more robust. But as we started to have children, we realized that Portland was not our home community. York County was. We needed to be proactive and help start building up our local Jewish community. A small group of young Jewish families in southern Maine partnered with the “elders” of Congregation Etz Chaim, in slowly building up a Jewish presence in York County.

Fast forward 38 years. Cantor Beth Strassler was ordained three years ago, and is now the spiritual leader of Congregation Etz Chaim. Dr. David Strassler, as an adult learner, has developed into the lay rabbi, working with Beth. David is also the President of the synagogue. Congregation Etz Chaim is now a thriving, full-service synagogue, with 85 member families, consisting of a Board with twelve local members, annual services for the Jewish High Holidays, weekly services or Torah study, Hebrew School, Teen program, holiday events, an active library and adult educational programming.

Now, our High Holiday services have 75 - 100 in attendance. However, we will continue to meet virtually until the COVID crisis is over.

Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Book Hour

By Maureen King

Love to read? Join our discussion!

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library introduces a Book Hour for book lovers. Each month, the Book Hour group will discuss a book highlighted by the Jewish Book Council. Choose to come to all sessions, or join sessions that most interest you. The Library will have at least one copy of the book available for borrowing (pick ups and drop offs can be arranged).

On March 24, from 6:30 to 7:30 PM EST, the Library will open the Book Hour, with a virtual discussion of ***My Mother's Son*** by David Hirshberg.

My Mother's Son, the meticulously-crafted debut novel from David Hirshberg, is a story told by a radio raconteur revisiting his past in post-World War II Boston, the playground and battleground for two brothers whose lives are transformed by discoveries they never could have imagined. From the opening line of the book, "When you're a kid, they don't always tell you the truth," the stage is set for this riveting coming-of-age story that plays out against the backdrop of the Korean War, the aftermath of the Holocaust, the polio epidemic, the relocation of a baseball team, and the shenanigans of politicians and businessmen. Hirshberg deftly weaves together events, characters, and clues and creates a rich tapestry of betrayal, persecution, death, loyalty, and unconditional love that resonates with today's America. (From Amazon)

Tentative Book Hour Schedule:

April 21 ***I Want You to Know We're Still Here: A Post-Holocaust Memoir*** by Esther Safran Foer

May 26 ***Apeiogon*** by Colum McCann

June 23 ***The Outskirts of Hope: A Memoir of the 1960s Deep South*** by Jo Ivester

Please email somlibrarymaine@gmail.com to sign up for the Book Hour notifications, Book Hour Zoom links, and to arrange for book borrowing.



Cantor's Corner

By Cantor Beth Strassler

A bright spot in my COVID-restrained life is studying Torah online with other Congregation Etz Chaim community members. Led by members of the Ritual Committee, the group meets twice a month to look closely at text, Hebrew expressions, and historical perspectives in order to find the relevance of ancient wisdom to our present lives.

The focus of each meeting is either the weekly Parsha (Torah reading chanted in the Saturday morning Shabbat Service) or another portion of the Jewish Bible from Prophets (Ne'vi'im) or Writings (Ketuvim). The weekly Parsha is "set" for each Shabbat morning service throughout the year. Our second study focus is chosen according to group members' interests. We recently looked more closely at the book of Daniel from the Writings. (My colleagues tell me we have been meeting for three years. Wow! Those years flew by...)

There is not just one presenter, but a group of five who separately plan to lead a portion of the discussion, according to each person's interest. It is important to say that this is a community study/discussion group, not a group of Yeshiva students approaching the text in Hebrew and quoting historical scholarly commentators. We are a group of interested learners from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

We use English translations—that is, we look at different translations to tease out the nuances of the text. Each translation is really its author's interpretation of the story. Where do the translations agree on the English words, but more importantly, where do they differ? What does the difference mean? Could one little difference in understanding a single word really matter? The answer is Yes, it could matter to the understanding of the story.

How important it is that a group shares the leadership and elicits everyone to contribute to the discussions! To have a group willing to step up to guide others in their learning is a blessing in our synagogue community.

How important it is that all who attend contribute opinions, reactions and insights. There is no "right" or "wrong", but differing ideas that ultimately lead to a richer overall understanding. We struggle together to make meaning out of stories passed down for centuries: First by telling one another for thousands of years, and then by securing them in writing more than 1500 years ago.

Meeting on Zoom is definitely not the same as meeting in person while sitting around a table with abundant books, ideas and face to face contact. But, I am here to tell you, it is really, really close.

*You are cordially invited to the
York County Community
Hebrew School
Chocolate Seder*



Thursday, March 25
*(Two evenings before
the first Passover seder)*
5 - 6 pm

*RSVP before March 20th
to receive the Zoom Link*
cantorstrassler@gmail.com

Cantor's Corner, cont.



It is fascinating when each discussion begins, because no one person knows exactly where it will end. By listening to each other and following the threads of each participant's contributions, we come to understandings that no one person would have reached alone. I have gained a new appreciation of the ancient recommendation that Torah study/discussion be conducted in groups, or at least between two partners. It takes each of us beyond the limits of our individual experiences and insular thoughts to the richer understanding that only comes from respectfully listening to each other.

You are invited to the table, invited to bring your unique perspective to the discussion and gain a richer understanding that may only be gained by joining a group of community members. Please contact me if you have an interest in joining, and/or more questions.

Congregation Etz Chaim Torah Study

9:30 to 11 am: March 27 (Parshat Tzav), April 10 (Parsha Shemini), April 24 (Achrei Mot), May 1 (TBA), May 22 (Nasso), May 29 (TBA) June 12 (Korach).

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86366254797?pwd=eIFzTTFjU0x4OXFnZVZRUFYanhYQT09>

Zoom Meeting ID: 863 6625 4797
Passcode: 676902

Samuel Osher Memorial Library

By Maureen King

Wednesday Library Coffee

Missing your mid-morning coffee break? Take it in the Library!

Did you know that the Samuel Osher Memorial Library sponsors a weekly morning coffee break? With the Library closed for health and safety reasons right now, you can't drop by the synagogue to see us, but you can visit us via Zoom.

Join us on **Wednesdays between 9:30 and 10:30 AM EST** for a quick break, or the whole hour. Bring your own beverage!

Conversations range from books to movies to culture to current events (although we do try to keep politics to a minimum).

Email somlibrarymaine@gmail.com by NOON on Tuesdays for the next day's Zoom link. We will email the link by Tuesday evening, and then you can just log in.

Join us Wednesday morning, whenever you're ready for your coffee break.
We look forward to chatting!

Top Ten Takeaways from Studying Moses' Leadership Style

By Cantor Beth Strassler

I recently completed a six-week course that analyzed the leadership style of Moses. The course was taught by the incomparable Ellie Miller through the JCA in Portland. Ellie is one of Maine's Torah scholars and a real treasure to the Jewish community.

My participation shed new light on the Exodus story and reinforced my belief that Moses was a great leader. Here are my Top Ten Takeaways from studying Moses' Leadership Style:

10. Begin leadership with humility. At the famous burning bush scene where God speaks to Moses and tells him that he will lead the Jews out of Egypt, Moses repeatedly denies that he is the best person for the job. Perhaps his humility was a major factor for God choosing him.
9. Never "go it alone". When Moses seems to have exhausted every argument in the burning bush exchange, God tells him "I will be with you". Moses finally agrees to take the job.
8. Know when you need help. Moses repeatedly describes himself as a poor public speaker, until God finally suggests that he team up with his brother, Aaron, to carry out the mission.
7. Know the culture of your adversaries. Having been rescued from the river and raised by the Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was raised in the palace, within the culture of his adversaries, which helps him in his negotiations with Pharaoh.
6. Maintain your patience. As the man in the middle during the wandering in the desert years, Moses needs patience to deal with both the people's complaints and God's anger. Although he demonstrates truly noble patience, he reaches his limits when dealing with the parties in each direction. This underscores that leaders are, above all, human (see #5).
5. We are all human. If Moses was truly the all-time, greatest leader of the Jewish people, why would we want to listen to stories that reveal so much struggle in his role? Because he was human, and we are human. We can relate to his struggles because they are not strange to us. Understanding him helps us to better understand ourselves.
4. Trust in the plan. The golden calf was certainly not part of the original plan, but it happened. Moses was able to mediate a solution that satisfied God's wrath, so that those actively involved in the act suffered the consequences, but the mission continued.

Top Ten Takeaways from Studying Moses' Leadership Style, cont.

3. Listen respectfully. People usually have a reason for complaining. In most cases in the desert, the people's complaints came from fear.
2. Listen discriminately. It is important to know when to just listen and when to effectively intervene. When the people first bent his ear about not having enough food, Moses took the matter to God, as he considered it to be a legitimate concern. His judgement was rewarded by God providing manna for the people to eat. But God went further, and used this as a "teaching moment", to begin to explain to the people the observance of Shabbat. He instructed them to gather double portions on the sixth day, to be ready to rest on the seventh. It turned into a win-win situation for everyone involved.
1. The focus is God. By keeping the focus on God and not on himself, Moses maintained the clarity of his leadership mission. He is not sidetracked by the wrath of God, the complaints of the people, or by his own ego. Moses succeeds because he remembers that God is with him.





Women's Book Club

Reading together since 2018!

By Maureen King

The Women's Book Club is about to meet for the 36th time!! On March 11, the group will gather on Zoom to discuss ***Florence Adler Swims Forever*** by Rachel Beanland, from 6:30 to 8 PM EST. **Please join us!**

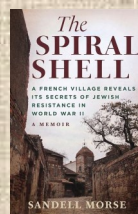
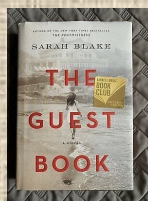
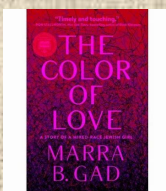
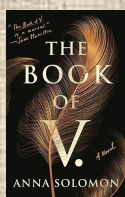
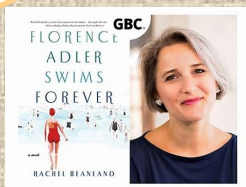
Susan Pierce leads the Book Club and enriches discussions with insights from her own reading, links to author interviews, and literary articles. Book Club members are active readers and enjoy sharing their thoughts about the book-of-the-night, as well as other books they are reading. This winter, the Women's Book Club discussed ***The Book of V*** by Anna Solomon, ***The Color of Love*** by Marra B. Gad, and ***The Guest Book*** by Sarah Blake. At December's meeting, the Book Club held a pre-Hanukkah Zoom party, complete with surprise treats and cookies delivered by "Hanukkah fairies".

The Women's Book Club was honored to host author Sandell Morse for a lively November discussion of her memoir, ***The Spiral Shell: A French Village Reveals Its Secrets of Jewish Resistance in World War II***. Ms. Morse, a former Maine resident, provided deep insight of her many trips to France to research the book, and about her writing process. The author spoke eloquently about her journey while writing ***The Spiral Shell***, and in reclaiming her own Judaism. It was a fascinating evening and was over all too quickly!

The Book Club will discuss ***The World to Come*** by Dara Horn at their April 8 Zoom meeting.

Other spring Book Club Zoom meeting dates are May 13 and June 10. The group will be choosing the upcoming books at their April meeting.

For more information about the Women's Book Club, email Susan Pierce (spiercel115@gmail.com) or Maureen King (somlibrarymaine@gmail.com).



High Holidays



Rosh Hashanah

Evening of Monday, Sept 6:	7:15 pm
Day 1: Tuesday, Sept 7:	9:30 am
Day 2: Wednesday, Sept 8:	9:30 am

Yom Kippur

Kol Nidrei: Wed, Sept 15:	6:45 pm
Thursday, Sept 16:	9:30 am
Yizkor	11:00 am
Afternoon Service:	4:45 pm
Break Fast:	6:45 pm

We hope we will be together in our sanctuary, but it is too early to decide that. Please stay in touch for More information on our web site.

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.*

Board of Directors at Congregation Etz Chaim

Julie Campisi
Linda and Frank Federman
Alan Fink
Denise Hammond
Maureen King
Cynthia Kurtz
Jeff Levy
Leah Macomber
Elyse Oliver
Jack Schraeter
David Strassler

**Samuel Osher Memorial Library
at Congregation Etz Chaim**

**Jewish Books, Music & Movies
for the
York County Community**

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.

Adrianne Levy, Editor & Layout Design Consultants:

Levy family & Board members

mail@etzchaimme.org

If we have your email address, you have been removed from the snail mailing list.

If you wish to continue to receive a paper newsletter, just write/email us.

Happy Passover!

The Board of Directors and Cantor Strassler would like to wish you and your family a very Happy Passover.



\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ **Go Green!!!** \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

You can save trees and reduce costs by receiving your newsletter, and all Jewish community announcements, electronically (save our trees!).

Just write to our mail address:

Congregation Etz Chaim

PO Box 905

Kennebunk, ME 04043

or send an email:

Email: mail@etzchaimme.org

and ask to:

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ **"Go Green"** \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$



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:

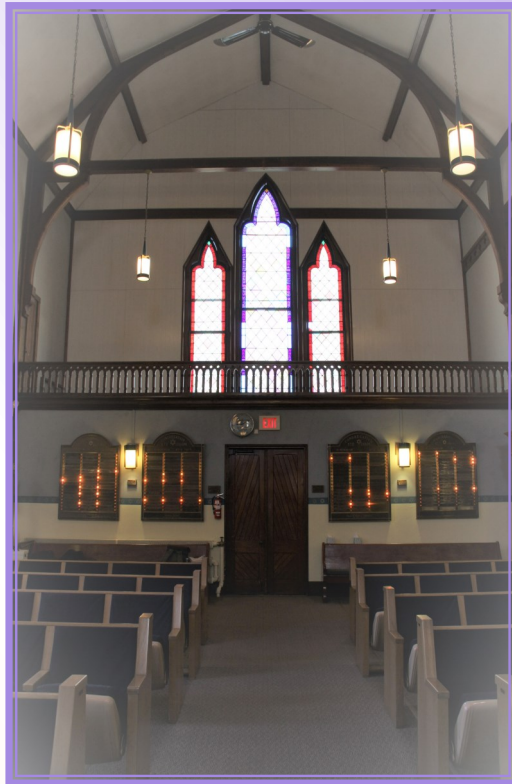
*PO Box 905,
Kennebunk, ME 04043*

Memorial Plaques, Prayer books,
Etz Chaim books of Torah:
Hebrew School/Services:
Shabbat Potlucks:
Library

*David Strassler:
Beth & David Strassler:
Linda Federman:
Maureen King*

*967-5833
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207-282-2907 or
somlibrarymaine@gmail.com.*

York County Jewish Community News



*Congregation Etz Chaim
PO Box 905
Kennebunk, ME 04043*

