

Fall 2021/5781

## Congregation Etz Chaim

### גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים (Acts of Loving Kindness)

By Cantor Beth Strassler

#### Inside this issue:

. Acts of Loving Kindness . Teen Class Graduation 2021—Edison	1-3
Why do we Fast on Yom Kippur?	4
United Congregation of Israelites and rescued Jews from the Holocaust	5-6
Teen Class Graduation 2021—Elaina	7
Cantor's Corner	8-9
. High Holidays Schedule . Teen Class Essay— Edison	10
. Looking Ahead: Etz Chaim 2022 and beyond . Library Opening Soon!	11-12
. Dear Etz Chaim Commu- nity . Community Corner	13
Teen Class Virtual Israel Tour	14-16
Arnold Shapiro Award Es- say	17
. Website link . Board of Directors . Library . Newsletter Info	18
. Go Green! . Our Synagogue . Synagogue Contacts	19

I am blessed to have the opportunity to serve the York County Jewish community by providing pastoral care. Our Board of Directors has placed this role near the top of the priority list in my job description. It happens via Zoom, on the phone, at the bedside, and through in-person meetings outdoors. The frequency varies from one time to twice a month.

You may be interested to know that pastoral counseling is a modern concept in the timeline of Judaism. Several years ago, I asked and searched and found no Hebrew word /phrase for “pastoral counseling”. Uh-oh. The absence of a term in the Hebrew language usually signals that it is not translatable as an aspect of Jewish life.

Throughout the ages, Jews have gone to their “Rebbe” for advice. The focus was on the clarification of a certain Jewish law or an individual’s compliance on a single matter of religious life. Modern Judaism, i.e., non-orthodox Judaism, began only in the mid 1800’s. The pastoral counseling that exists today is modeled on a psychological counseling session, which was not a Jewish orthodox practice. Yes, yes: Woody Allen & Freud are included in our cultural concept of the practice of psychology/psychiatry, but they are both “modern men” in Jewish history.

The current practice of pastoral counseling evolved from a Christian foundation. This was an interesting “fun fact” for me, the only Jew in the classes I attended at Boston College. Knowing this helped me to realize why I could not relate to some of the class terminology. It is not unusual for cantorial and rabbinical students to take pastoral counseling from a Christian source. However, there are fundamental differences in the translation of the same word in the Judeo and the Christian religions.

Winston Churchill is credited with the statement: “We are two nations separated by a common language.” He was referring to the United Kingdom and the USA. However, his observation is also true regarding the two religious systems of Judaism and Christianity.

The majority of readings in the classes were from Christian sources. The terminology is often value-laden: atonement, messiah, salvation, grace, Holy Spirit. Most Christians read the words and have similar ideas because they share a common theological framework. Jews do not share the same framework. I have included the dictionary definition of “grace” below as an illustration.\*\*



## גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים (Acts of Loving Kindness), cont. By Cantor Beth Strassler

This difference leads Jewish students in pastoral counseling to constantly ask themselves, “Wait—what does this concept mean? Is this within the Jewish belief system? If it is not, can I find a relevant concept in Judaism?”

Sometimes they do, sometimes they do not. The inner conflict created often distances Jewish students from their clinical supervisors and many of their Christian classmates. The situation may become further complicated by the Jewish style of learning and communication. Jews are *used* to debating and discussing the Bible. Jews show interest and appreciation in a conversation by “cooperative overlapping” (talking while another person continues to talk), and abrupt shifts of topic. The Jewish study practice of “pilpul” is intense questioning, challenging, and confronting. Non-Jewish listeners may look at these elements of a conversational style as rude.

I adopted the belief that the essence of pastoral care—that is, extending oneself to another for the purpose of (*providing*) relief from suffering—is central to Jewish responsibility and modern community life (Friedman). The difference is that it is not only the responsibility of Jewish religious leaders, but on every individual Jew.

גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים (Acts of Loving Kindness) is in the Hebrew vocabulary. In fact, it is considered the highest level of mitzvah. It is a foundational belief in Judaism that God created a world that is not yet perfect. Doing this mitzvah means we become “partners of God in the world’s creation.” (Green). Jewish tradition has long been based on the belief that the chance to serve God is considered a blessed opportunity.

Another aspect of חֶסֶד is בְּקֹר חוֹלִים, visiting the sick and homebound. “Whoever visits the sick takes away one-sixtieth of their distress.” (Sheer, based on a Jewish sage tradition). Traditionally, a group of community members arrived at the time of daily prayers to ensure the minimum number of participants for a prayer service in the home.

Pastoral counseling differs from any other counseling because it includes a religious aspect. Sometimes it is a questioning of the belief in God, a return to Judaism to find more meaning in life, or a time of doubt about whether God is truly with us as we go through life.

Judaism values doing. Jews tend to be more comfortable doing for God versus talking about God. It is a personal trauma, a liminal moment in their life or a decades old lack of religious activity that often leads to confusion about their beliefs. I often hear a person say that they want to get back to Judaism in order to find more meaning in their present life. Although they have not talked about God in a long time, there is a memory that it may help, it may ease their mind if they began to pay attention to Judaism again.

## גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים (Acts of Loving Kindness), cont. By Cantor Beth Strassler

### Sources:

Friedman, Rabbi Dayle A. (2011). Jewish Pastoral Care, 2nd edition. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights.

Green, Arthur. (2012). These are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights.

Sheer, Charles (2008). Bikkur Holim: The Origins of Jewish Pastoral Care. Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy: Volume 15, pg 99.

Taylor, Rabbi Bonita Taylor and Zucker, Rabbi David J. (2002) Nearly Everything We Wish our Non-Jewish Supervisors Had Known About Us as Jewish Supervisees. The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Volume 56, #4.

### **\*\*Dictionary definition of “grace”:**

**3** (in Christian belief) the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. • a divinely given talent or blessing: the graces of the Holy Spirit.

What????!!!! It seems that understanding of the definition requires an understanding of four more non-Jewish concepts.

## Teen Class Graduation 2021

By Edison Macomber

In May I graduated from Teen Class. I participated for three years, which included 1 ½ years in person and 1 ½ years virtual. Even though the virtual Teen Class was different, it was just as amazing as the in-person class.

During the first year, we got together every week, ate pizza and chips and talked about books and movies. The culmination of the year was the annual New York City trip. We visited the Tenement Museum, saw “*Come From Away*” on Broadway, and I sampled a ton of traditional New York Deli foods. It was great to spend this time with my teen class peers, David and Ethan Davis.

During the second year, we read a lot of books and watched a lot of movies. We had tickets to go see “*To Kill A Mockingbird*” on Broadway, but the trip was cancelled because of Covid. What a disappointment.

During the third year, we read books and watched movies and we ate donuts together over Zoom. What a surprise when we learned that David had come up with a special activity to culminate the year - a virtual tour of... Israel! The virtual Israel trip was incredible. Although I had been to Israel before, seeing it this way from a different perspective was great. Our online guide was fun, enthusiastic, and interesting, and we saw a ton of things that I never knew existed in Israel. If you ever get a chance to do this, I highly recommend it!



## Why Do We Fast On Yom Kippur?

By David Strassler

“On the tenth day of the same seventh month, you shall observe a sacred occasion when you shall practice self-denial.” Numbers 29:7

I think the first year I fasted for Yom Kippur was when I was 8 years old. I lasted till 10 am, when my Mom offered me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich she had hidden away. Why did I fast at such a young age? Peer pressure. I am the youngest of 4 boys, and they all fasted (so I was led to believe). By the time I was 11, I was able to hold out till the community Break Fast. But I still remember spending most of the days thinking of the one food I craved. It might have been a soft pretzel, a slice of pizza, or a bowl of plums in thick fruit juice.

Somewhere during my Jewish Education, I learned that I was fasting to “atone for my sins”. And fasting got easier every year. Not too long ago, I learned about a different rationalization behind the Yom Kippur fast: as a way to avoid the distraction of thinking of what food you will be preparing to eat (as long as your hunger pains are not equally distracting). This also made sense: 2 Jews, 3 opinions.

As Beth and I were preparing for the High Holidays, I read a commentary in our High Holiday Prayer Book that refreshed my memory about what these holidays are all about. Joseph Rosenstein, who compiled this Machzor, always does a wonderful job in sharing his easy-to-understand commentaries. The one I focused on was for the Haftorah for Yom Kippur.

“In a dramatic exchange that is as relevant, effective today as it was 2500 years ago, Isaiah berates those who are just going through the motions as they fast on Yom Kippur. He brashly imagines that G-d says: ‘Is this the kind of fast that I wanted, a day whose focus is self-affliction? Do I really want you to bow your head like a bullrush, to wear sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you mean by a fast, a day to obtain G-d’s approval?’ The obvious answer- ‘Of course not!’- is unstated, and instead Isaiah tells us what G-d really wants: ‘This is the kind of fast that I want: Loosen the bonds by wickedness, untie the cords that keep people enslaved, snap all the yokes of the oppressed and let them go free. Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless into your house; provide clothing for those who lack it, and do not turn away from those in need.’ According to Isaiah, we serve G-d by bringing about social justice.”

I recommend you read the next paragraph in the Machzor Eit Ratzon (High Holiday Prayer Book) on pages 232-233 to find out how acting justly may transform one’s life.

I am looking forward to hearing Elyse Oliver, one of our Board members, chant the Yom Kippur Haftorah this year. Plus, I am looking forward to see y’all for these High Holidays.

Gut Yontif (Yiddish for “wishing you a good holiday”).



## ***The United Congregation of Israelites and rescued Jews from the Holocaust***

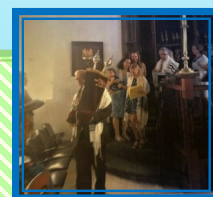
***By Jack Schraeter***

It was March 26, 2019, a Tuesday, and I was at Logan Airport in Boston, Massachusetts, ready to board a flight to Kingston, Jamaica for a 5-day recruitment event. I had spent the previous 18 months working to assemble the necessary case management group, recruiters on the ground and the necessary support staff for a nurse recruitment program on the Island of Jamaica. Jamaica has a large contingent of nurses qualified to work in America and that was my target group. I also knew that over the last decade, Jamaica had sunk into significant crime and lawlessness, and there was motivation for many to seek immigration out. In actuality, Kingston, the capitol, has such a high crime rate that the large vacation resorts along the coast have stopped using the airport in Kingston and instead, brings in guests via the airport in Montego Bay.

To be frank, I was unprepared for the large swaths of urban blight, for the heavy police presence and the ever-present private security guards in stores and hotels. Steel bars on windows, barking guard dogs in alleys and a strong sense of a general fear of gangs and drug lords. It was clear that getting into the hotel was to be a gauntlet of security checks and being frisked. I already knew this was no place to rent a car, so instead we had arranged for a car driver each day to be at our disposal. Our driver was both driver and guide and he made sure we went to a "safe" place to eat lunch and dinner. I will say, with us, he ate very well and we got to eat in some local restaurants and lunch joints we would never have found on our own.

I had planned this trip to include one full "off day" on Saturday and Sunday morning for those applicants and staff who wanted to go to Church. I was going to Synagogue on Saturday at the large historic Synagogue Shaare Shalom - The United Congregation of Israelites. This Shul was built in 1912 and was created during the merger of the Sephardic congregation (the majority of Jews in Jamaica) and the English and German Ashkenazi congregation (who were the minority). The prior synagogue on this site was destroyed in the 1907 earthquake. The building housing Shaare Shalom - The United Congregation of Israelites, is not only striking in its appearance, but is famous for being one of only 5 synagogues in the world with a sand floor.

There has been a long and not very well known history of a Jewish presence on the Island of Jamaica, yet a most interesting one. Jews have been present on the island for the past 523 years. They came primarily from Portugal, having first fled the Spanish Inquisition. To conceal their identity, they referred to themselves as "Portuguese" and practiced their religion secretly. At the time of the British conquest of Jamaica in 1655, General Robert Venables, recorded the presence of many "Portuguese" in Jamaica. The Jews were allowed to remain after the conquest and began to practice Judaism openly. They were granted British citizenship by Oliver Cromwell, which was confirmed in 1660 by King Charles II of England.





## ***The United Congregation of Israelites and rescued Jews from the Holocaust, cont.***

***By Jack Schraeter***

For many Jews, Jamaica became a safe place they could live in without fear of persecution. Jews from Amsterdam, Bordeaux, and Bayonne moved to Jamaica, mostly residing in Port Royal. Port Royal even had what was called a Jew Street. The first synagogue, Kahal Kadosh Neve Tsedek, was built in 1719 and there were more to follow as the Jewish community grew in both size and economic wealth. In 1720, it was recorded that 18% of the population were Jewish. For the most part, the Jewish population practiced the Sephardic rites of orthodox rituals and customs. Sadly, for better or worse, from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews were part of the slave owning class until the British Parliament outlawed slavery in 1834.

Over time, many Jamaicans of African descent intermarried, many to Jews, and converted or raised their offspring Jewish. This has resulted in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century Jewish population to be one of the most diverse in the Americas. By mid-twentieth century, the Jewish population began introducing Progressive Judaism into their rituals. Progressive Judaism had a combination of reform and conservative rituals, with elements of both Sephardic and Ashkenazi.

In 1941, as World War II raged on in Europe, the Jamaican Jewish community heard about the extra capacity in a military camp on the island and they began to lobby the British to let in Jewish refugees from Europe. Meanwhile, the Dutch government in exile requested that Jamaica temporarily accept Dutch refugees who were en-route to the Dutch Colonial Caribbean islands of Surinam and Curacao. In the end, 300 Polish refugees and 700 Dutch refugees were housed at Camp Gibraltar. After the war, the Gibraltar refugee camp was converted into the University of the West Indies, the first English-speaking university in the Caribbean.

The Jewish contribution to Jamaican life as a community has focused largely on education. After Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, which devastated Jamaica, the community established Reading Rooms at the University of the West Indies with some assistance from the Joint Distribution Committee and the United Way of Jamaica.

Jamaican Jews, over the centuries, have contributed in many economic aspects, including cultural and social life. This included the professions, mercantilism as well as arts and culture. Today, there are 500 acknowledged Jewish families in Kingston and probably an equal number of others not affiliated. Again, there is a significant percentage of mixed-race individuals and families who consider themselves Jewish.

Back to the Nurse recruitment part of my journey, we interviewed over 100 nurses, extended offers to 65, and 50 accepted. All were conditional on passing the NCLEX nurse licensing exam - 47 passed and made it into the United States before Covid struck. And best of all, I got an Aliyah while I was there!



## ***Teen Class Graduation 2021***

***By Elaina Hammond***

Hey, we made it! I remember starting Hebrew School, learning blessings and the alphabet with my Great Aunt Barbara. Now here i am learning about Israel, the history of my faith, and influential people who got us to this point. I have learned so much in these three years, and i owe it all to my peers and my teacher, David. It has nott been the easiest three years, but i am grateful for the wisdom and lessons David taught us.

If I had to say my favorite part, I won't lie to you, the food was pretty good. We always left class with a full stomach, that's for sure. We would eat pizza, ice cream, personal snacks, and chinese food. Once we got to the virtual Israel trip, we got to experience new foods we had never tried before. I wouldn't say i was the biggest fan of all of them, but it was fun learning where we could buy them and the history behind these plates in Israel. Even when we were online, David still managed to bring us snacks and surprises.

The movies were also a fun way to spend our class time. I couldn't think of any movie that didn't have a reason or message behind it. Each movie we watched was carefully linked to the lesson of that week. Some were classics, like To Kill a Mockingbird or 12 Angry Men. In our last year, we even got to pick out the movie ourselves and lead our very own discussion about it. This excited me more than you could know. I spent about a week talking with my family, trying to pick out a good film and eventually came to the film Little Women (the one released in 2019). I spent a few days researching and preparing my discussion questions, as I had so much i wanted to say about this piece. This was probably the key highlight of our class this year, because of how involved I felt, even when online.

The most important part of this class to me, though, were the discussions and lessons we took away. It was different from any other class you could take, since the lesson didn't focus on the history, dates and chanting hebrew. It was about the big questions that we ponder, like what happens after death, or where exactly is God? These discussions were key in my understanding of Judaism, as in my eyes being Jewish is asking ourselves these big questions. It's about being curious and questioning what is around you. David helped bring this to our attention, which I will always be grateful for. These discussions and questions shape Judaism in my eyees, and now I feel I truly understand the faith that I follow.

Going into the future, I will alwaysremember this time that we shared. I may not remember every movie or every book that David had us read, but I will remember these discussions and the questions we debated. I will take what I have learned and continue to research and ask questions. I will take the lessons David taught me and incorporate them into my life. Lessons around being kind, caring, and a good person. Thank you, David, for everything!





## Cantor's Corner

By Cantor Beth Strassler

On a beautiful July morning in Lake Arrowhead, I had the honor of witnessing the immersion of four young adults to complete their conversions to Judaism. What a privilege for me to be their guide on the formal journey that began shortly after the High Holidays last year!

Conversion is an intricate part of Judaism. The custom is thousands of years old and applicable to all denominations of our religion. Numbers 15:15 provides the biblical mandate that conversion be a "statute forever throughout your generations". Once one has converted, Jewish law and custom considers each convert to be fully a Jew.

Each person took a unique route that culminated in their desire for a confirmed Jewish identity and a commitment to follow a Jewish way of life for themselves and their children.

Some of their families were supportive, and some were not. These four converts found a new family with me and each other, even though our primary contact was through Zoom. One is scheduled to travel to Israel on the Birthright program. Another looks forward to finally seeing the inside of our synagogue when attending future services and social events. A third is incorporating their new identity with their Maine vegetable garden with the Jewish Garden Cookbook. The fourth looks forward to bringing up and educating their children with their Jewish spouse.

While working or studying from home, each made a commitment to be a student in a Zoom Jewish Literacy class with me. We completed 12-14 two-hour sessions between November and May. We read and discussed several books, which I have listed at the end of this article.

We discussed content: Prayer, God, Jewish beliefs & holidays, the events in the Jewish lifecycle, Jewish history, and Israel. We talked about the process: What does it mean to identify oneself with the Jewish people? How will their lives change? Do they understand the parameters of "kosher"? We discussed their futures: Finding a synagogue, raising children, integrating their own family with the rest of their family and friends, as well as accepting that not everyone will understand their life choices.

At the end of the class, all were on board to convert. We began the next stage of the process.

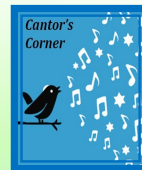
For the men, there was a ritual called "hatafat dam brit", or a drop of blood. Dr. David Strassler led this private procedure. There is a natural trepidation at undergoing such an intimate commitment, but he was able to complete it with prayer, study and celebration, guiding each to find meaning in the experience.

The next requirement was for each candidate to meet with a 'Beit Din' or a Jewish court of three. Membership of the court requires a panel of three people knowledgeable about Judaism and the conversion process. A minimum of one must be a clergy member (myself). I rounded out the panel with Jack Schraeter, who comes from a long line of rabbis and yeshiva education, and our synagogue's lay Rabbi, President, and lifelong learner, David Strassler.



## Cantor's Corner, cont.

By Cantor Beth Strassler



The assessment of each candidate during the Beit Din includes Jewish knowledge. However, the panel is *primarily* charged with evaluating the sincerity, emotional and psychological readiness of the candidate to take on their new Jewish identity and lifestyle. Approval by the panel is their best guess that the candidate will be successful leading a Jewish life and will pass it down to future generations.

The final requirement is full immersion in a mikveh, or a natural body of water. Immersion was held at Lake Arrowhead (and the first time the class met face to face). We were all filled with the joy and excitement of this liminal event. Each candidate completed three full immersions: Simultaneously covering the head in water & bringing feet off the ground. Each "dunk" was followed by Hebrew prayer.

We rounded out the day sharing wine to sanctify the event. Each person received a carefully chosen book, a Certificate of Conversion, and I read Megillat Ruth aloud. Ruth is by far the most famous convert to Judaism and the great grandmother of King David. You probably know her famous statement to her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, after all the menfolk in their lives were gone.

*"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."*

May we all feel the exuberance of our newest members of "the Tribe" as we celebrate the upcoming holidays. May you and your loved ones have a healthy, prosperous and loving year to come.

See you in shul,  
Beth

Jewish Literacy books:

Donin, Rabbi Hayim Halevy. (1972/2019). *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life*. New York: BasicBooks.

Green, Arthur. (2016). *Judaism's Ten Best Ideas*. USA: Jewish Lights Publication.

Steinberg, Paul. 1. (2007) *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Fall Holidays*; 2. (2007) *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Winter Holidays*; 3. (2009) *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Spring and Summer Holidays*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.

Syme, Rabbi Daniel. (2017). *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*. Milburn, NJ: Behrman House.

Rosenstein, Joseph. (2006) *Siddur Eit Ratzon: Prayerbook for Shabbat and Holidays*. NJ: Shiviti Publications.



## Congregation Etz Chaim

on Bacon Street in Biddeford

### Rosh Hashanah 5782

Evening of Monday, Sept 6 7:15 pm

Day 1: Tuesday, Sept 7

& Day 2, Wednesday, Sept 8

Preliminary Prayers 9:15 am

Morning Service 9:30 am

Day 1 only

Tashlich at the Saco River 12:40 pm

### Yom Kippur 5782

Kol Nidrei: Wed, Sept 15 6:45 pm

Thursday, Sept 16 9:30 am

Preliminary Prayers 9:15 am

Morning Service. 9:30 am

Yizkor 11:30 am

Afternoon Service: 4:45 pm

Break Fast online: End of services

We will offer all services in the shul, on Zoom & Facebook. Check for the online link on our website closer to the service dates. [etzchaimme.org](http://etzchaimme.org)

All attending indoors must

- Be fully vaccinated.
- Wear a mask at all times.
- Maintain a safe physical distance from others.

Please contact David Strassler with any questions:

[strassler@roadrunner.com](mailto:strassler@roadrunner.com)

207.967.5833

IF, during the week preceding services, the leadership decides it would not be safe to hold services indoors, we will send out an email blast and post the info on our website and Facebook page. You will always be able to participate online.

We are pleased to announce that our services will be led by our very own Cantor Beth Strassler, with the keyboard accompaniment of Dr. Morton Gold.

## Teen Class Essay

By Edison Macomber

I feel lucky to be Jewish. It's great that it encourages open-mindedness, discourages hate and prejudice. I can tell someone I'm Jewish without them feeling like I'm trying to change the way they think. Judaism promotes camaraderie to and from everyone, which is something that is nothing less than essential for humanity.

Teen class allowed me to become more in touch with, and knowledgeable about, my Jewish faith. That is something rare, since they don't teach any kind of Jewish culture or history in the vast majority of core history classes in school. So I've learned to cherish the things I'm taught in Hebrew School.

I've also had the opportunity to form friendships with my classmates through a Jewish medium, which I've never done before, and I've come to value our relationships. Of course, I'd like to thank my mom for driving me to and from various Hebrew School related events, and for making sure I get my work done on time, and my dad for encouraging me throughout. Even Austin helped me at points. Lastly, I'd really like to thank David - I feel my thinking has matured and polished since I started this class, and that is in big part thanks to him. His lesson planning was excellent, and it was clear the effort he put in to make sure we had a fun and productive class each week. Through the movies, books, talks, lessons and relationships, I have definitely grown as a person and as a Jew. Thank you.



## Looking ahead: Etz Chaim 2022 and beyond

By Elyse Oliver

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic has required all of us to individually reflect on the priorities and goals shaping our personal and professional lives, so too has the pandemic encouraged the Board of Directors to use a new lens with which to take stock of Etz Chaim's development and future outlook.

In Spring 2021, the Board began a review of past strategic priorities, as documented in the congregation's 2005 strategic plan. We aimed to determine our progress toward those goals to date, and determine whether they still reflect our community's aspirations for the synagogue, given the decade plus span of time since they were originally conceived. Overall, the Board was heartened by the tangible progress in each area of work. We hope long-standing members also see the stark contrast between our shul in 2005 and 2021.

Priority areas	Progress since 2005
Membership involvement	Congregation Etz Chaim has successfully increased its membership since 2005. More formal efforts to maintain this expansion have included expanded connections with area community groups (e.g., Heart of Bedford), and development of a mailing list and modern, updated website.
Organizational structure	Since 2005, Congregation Etz Chaim has made great strides in formalizing functions core to the congregation's operation. The Board established by-laws, developed a Board committee structure, and combined governance for the Hebrew School, Library, and Synagogue. Generally considered the starkest difference in organizational structure since 2005 has been the addition of professional spiritual leadership with the cantorial position.
Facilities upgrade	Congregation Etz Chaim has advanced a number of facilities improvements to maintain the health and safety of members and event participants, including: Installation of a new roof, Refurbishment of the main sanctuary with new carpets and seating, Renovation of the kitchen, Installation of new floors throughout the congregation, Audiovisual system upgrades, Installation of an external monitoring system, Installation of panic buttons and training on emergency response (e.g., "active shooter" scenarios).
Volunteer participation	Volunteer participation has increased since 2005; there are 12-15 committed volunteers who contribute their time to support event planning and preparation.
Educational programs	Since 2005, Congregation Etz Chaim has developed a series of educational programs with steady member participation. These events include adult education, Israeli dancing, Torah study, and library book group, to name just a few. There also continues to be robust curriculum development surrounding Hebrew School, focused on reading Hebrew and traditions associated with holiday celebrations.
Congregational funds/finances	Congregation Etz Chaim's financial positioning has become stronger as a result of diversification of the organization's investment portfolio and expanded donor relationships.

## **Looking ahead: Etz Chaim 2022 and beyond, cont.**

**By Elyse Oliver**

While the Board has decided not to embark on a new strategic planning process at this time, Board members have determined that Etz Chaim will need to refine its areas of focus for efforts in 2022 and beyond. Going forward, the Board will be identifying discrete actions within each of these priority areas that will continue momentum with Etz Chaim's trajectory of growth and foster long-term sustainability. The Board is excited to build this roadmap, and efforts are set to begin following our High Holiday celebration.

As we have more chances to gather through hybrid services and events, we encourage you to share your own perspectives on the strides in synagogue development and future opportunities with the Board members you meet.

## ***The Samuel Osher Memorial Library will reopen soon!***

**By Maureen King**

In person book borrowing (and curbside pickup, if needed) will be available this September!

Masks will be required, and all other synagogue health and safety protocols must be followed.

Days and times will be announced soon.

For questions and volunteering, contact Maureen at:

[somlibrarymaine@gmail.com](mailto:somlibrarymaine@gmail.com).



## Dear Etz Chaim Community

By Leah Macomber

I want to convey my sincere gratitude for the outpouring of support I received from Etz Chaim when I was hurt in February. As many of you know, I fell down some stairs and ended up in the Emergency Room with a concussion.

I didn't know what to expect when I got home from the ER and started to follow the doctor's orders (rest, don't look at screens, rest...). I thought I would be fine the next day. Boy was I wrong! So when I tell you I was so grateful for your support, I mean it. The meals were nourishing and helpful to my family, the flowers brightened my house (and the table in my bedroom, where I stared for days and days), and the cards filled with encouraging words gave me the comfort and strength I needed. Some of you reached out by phone, text, email or cookie-gram just to say hello and send me virtual hugs – I appreciated every communication from you. You made me feel like part of the community.

A special thank you to Denise Hammond, who, with the help of the Board of Directors, created a new Outreach Committee to facilitate these types of support efforts. As someone who benefited in immeasurable ways, I am proud to be in this community and a participant in the Outreach Committee's efforts.

THANK YOU!

Leah Macomber

## Etz Chaim Community Corner

By Denise Hammond

The Community Outreach Committee is busy organizing! This Fall, we hope to have a home on the temple's website! We want to make sure our committee is easily accessible to our community. If there is a need or something to celebrate, we are ready to help and support! Just email Denise Hammond at: [Dghammond@roadrunner.com](mailto:Dghammond@roadrunner.com).

This past summer we organized meals for three weeks for a post-surgery community member, sent flowers to let a member know we were with them in their grief after the loss of a loved one, and celebrated recent graduates with bags of goodies!

Want to join us in our email list? Email [Dghammond@roadrunner.com](mailto:Dghammond@roadrunner.com) and let us know you'd like to be included. Know of someone who could use support? Email that to me too.

Thanks for sharing and helping!

## A Virtually Perfect Tour: Teen Class Explores Israel

By Eva Aranovitch

Everyone in the Congregation Etz Chaim community knows that the highlight of Teen Class is the spring trip to New York City. But for the second year in a row (and my first year of Teen Class), the trip was cancelled because of COVID. Our teacher, David Strassler, still wanted to make sure that we had a special end-of-the-year event, though. So, instead of going to New York, we went to Israel instead. You may ask: if we couldn't go to NYC because of the pandemic, how did we get to Israel? Well, it's because ours was a special kind of trip. It didn't involve a 12-hour plane ride or wearing masks. David brought Israel to us.

Over the course of the last five weeks of Teen Class, we Zoomed in for an online tour hosted by Mordechai Cohen, a resident of Israel. We virtually travelled with Mordechai to different parts of Israel each week, learning about the places and history of the country, and we even ate a different Israeli food each week, including rugelach, Bamba, hummus, and shakshuka.

On our first day of the tour, we saw the beaches of Tel Aviv, the world's largest mezuzah, and we learned about how Israel's National Trail was based on the Appalachian Trail in the U.S. We also went to the south of Israel to Eilat to see the Red Sea and the city's underwater observatory. From the Red Sea, we moved on to the desert to Timna Park, where we saw the famous Mushroom Rock (shaped by wind and soil erosion) as well as the copper mines.

Then we went to Jerusalem, where we visited the City of David and went to Ketef Hinnom, the site of a famous archeological dig. There we learned about Jewish burial customs during the time of the First Temple, which are very different from our burial customs today.

We started the second part of our tour in Jerusalem's open market, where we saw all the brightly colored fruit/vegetable stands and the street graffiti. We also stopped into Marzipan, an Israeli bakery famous for its rugelach.

We then ventured to the Temple Mount to learn about the history of the First and Second Temple. Mordechai explained to us that King Herod wanted to make the second Temple bigger than the first. So he had the top of the mountain expanded into a wide platform, and built upon it. We also toured the Dome of the Rock and learned that the rock underneath it is believed to be the rock that helped create the "big bang" that started the universe – the same rock where people think that Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac. At the Western Wall, we saw the largest stone, measuring 45 feet in length, ever used in a building.

Then we went to Caesarea, a city built by King Herod to honor Rome's Caesar. It has an aqueduct, a theater, and a hippodrome for chariot racing. We also saw the Dead Sea Scrolls, considered Israel's national treasure, which are housed in the Shrine of the Book and learned the story of how they were first discovered. From there, we traveled to Masada in the Judean Desert and heard the story of how, long ago, the Jews killed themselves rather than surrender to the Romans who had them surrounded.

As a bonus, David's cousin Matan joined our Zoom and spoke to us from Kibbutz Ein HaMifratz in Israel where he has lived his whole life. He talked about how life on the kibbutz has changed over the years to allow the residents more personal freedom and decision-making power.



## A Virtually Perfect Tour: Teen Class Explores Israel, cont.

By Eva Aranovitch

The third part of our trip may have been my favorite. Mordechai took us to Aleh, a residential village for people with disabilities that was created by Major General Doron Almog, who led the 1976 hostage rescue mission in Uganda. As someone who used to work with disabled children, I was very interested by this village. It has a pool for hydrotherapy, a petting farm, and a gardening program.

Other spots we visited during this part of the trip included the Cave of the Patriarchs on the West Bank in Hebron, the waterfalls of Ein Gedi, the city of Heifa, where we learned about the Baha'i religion that emphasizes unity and diversity, and Safed, a city known for Kabbalistic art.

Week four's excursions came at a time when there was an outbreak of violence in Israel, so Mordechai shared with us what it is like living in a country that could be under attack at any moment. It made me grateful that I do not live in a place where people need "safe rooms" in their houses.

Instead of going from place to place, we focused more on Israeli history. We learned about the period from 1939 to the start of WWII when Great Britain was in control of Israel and created the White Papers laws, which prohibited any more Jews from coming into Israel.

Mordechai also told us the very interesting story of how a group of Israeli Jews prepared for the possibility that Israel would gain independence at the end of the war and would have to immediately start defending itself. This group of mostly teens and young adults created an underground ammunition factory on the Ayalon kibbutz right under the noses of the British military. They disguised it by creating a laundromat and a bakery above-ground. The noises of the laundry machines covered up the noises of the bullet machines, and a washing machine could be moved to reveal a secret hatch that led down to the factory. Sure enough, shortly after Israel was given independence, the country was attacked by neighboring Arab nations, and the bullets manufactured at Ayalon were used in Israel's War of Independence.

The last segment of our trip brought us to the Golan Heights, and we explored the salt caves near the Dead Sea. We also went to the Negev Desert where green electricity is produced, and we learned about the Jewish National Fund's planting program.

The highlight for me was hearing the story of Israeli national hero Elie Cohen, an Egyptian-born Israeli spy who went undercover in Syria to develop relationships with Syria's political and military leaders. He reported information back to Israel so that the Israeli military knew about Syria's plan to divert the Jordan River in order to deprive Israel of water. The information he gave to Israel led them to destroy the equipment that the Syrians were going to use to accomplish this. He also gave Israel information about targets that helped Israel capture the Golan Heights and win the Six-Day War.

While it would have been nice to be able to physically go on a trip with my classmates, our virtual journey to Israel was a great experience. As someone who has never been to Israel, I feel like our tour with Mordechai gave us a true taste of the country – and not just because we got to eat Bamba. We were able to see the sites of an entire country rather than just one city, and I'm pretty sure none of us missed having sore feet or standing in long security lines.

## ***Teen Class Graduation 2021***

By Abby Davis

My favorite part of teen class was the New York City trip that David, Elena, Eddie, Dad and i took. It was so memorable because i had never been on a trip with such a rigorous itinerary before. We got up early to meet at the Biddeford parking lot at 6 a.m., which was a struggle because i am not a morning person. Then we loaded all of our stuff and headed down to Rein's Deli in Connecticut. I was able to try a chocolate egg cream and was confused by it because it tastes like somebody put seltzer in a milkshake. It was the first of many interesitng experiences on the trip, and made me excited to try new things.

When we got to New York City, we took a tour of the outside of the tenement buildings with the Tenement Museum. It peaked my interest as i have always been fascinated by immigrants and how they lived. Our tour guide described the architecture in a way that made me want to know more. I was to go back to the Tenement Museum and see the insides of the building, as i have learned that i learn better when i see and experience things. Unfortunately, the Tenement Museum closed due ot COVID so that won't be possible. Later that evening, we saw the play "Come From Away" in Times Square. The play was about a platne that had to land in a remote town due to 9/11 and the actors told the story very well. What really stood out to me was Times Square. It was mind-blowing for me because i have never experienced anything like it before.

There were so many people - women walking around practically naked, a man with a mask who was staring at himself in the glass and working out, and some anti-white people yelling at us. When we left the play, it was a weir d feeling—i knew we were outside, but it felt like we were inside with all the lights and activity. The next day, we went to the 9/11 Museum. It felt sad, but i also had an immense feeling of respect for all the first responders and people who were there on Stepember 11, 2001. In the museum, there was a mangled firetruck, which stood out to me. I think it stood out because it was a physical thing that had been through 9/11. it showed the amount of destruction that happened, but also symbolized the sense of community and togetherness that the US felt after the attack. The whole New York experience was unforgettable and makes me want to travel more and experience different things. It also made me realize that i learn best through experiences. David and all of the parents, thank you for making tghe last 3 years memorable.



## *Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award—2021 Essay*

By Austin Macomber

I want to tell you how meaningful Congregation Etz Chaim has been to me. I have been part of the synagogue for as long as I remember, which was when I was doing crafts with the Levy family and Miss Julie and hearing the Torah stories for the first time from David. I remember thinking that I had something in common with the people around me. It was after I heard the story of Hanukkah at one of our parties that I finally understood what Judaism meant for the first time - that I was a member of a huge group of people that stretched across the world and thousands of years in time. I had identified what related me to the people at the synagogue in such a unique way, and it was a sincere kinship.

Over the years I have had some excellent interactions with the Etz Chaim community. During my Bar Mitzvah training I felt showered with acceptance and love as I was tutored by Beth and coached by Jack. My Bar Mitzvah was over Thanksgiving and was attended by my 30+ cousins and many other family members. More than once I was told that our temple was beautiful and the congregation was welcoming. I was filled with gratitude for such an environment and pride because it was mine.

During Teen Class, I learned so much about being Jewish. Rob taught me a lot about my ancestry and David taught me a lot about modern day Judaism. Our trips to NYC were outstanding and gave me a love of New York I would cherish in the future. In fact, I am going to college in NYC and look forward to revisiting some of the sites – especially Katz Deli! I remember feeling that so much of NYC was Jewish, that I personally had a real place in the world.

Back at Etz Chaim, I feel that I have made an impact; not only with the various volunteer activities handled by the Hebrew School, but also by the way I personally helped the community. During the High Holidays of 2020 I delivered High Holiday prayer books to many Etz Chaim families. When Purim came around, I delivered bags to those families too. Most of the time I left packages on doorsteps, but sometimes I'd see a smiling face and maybe a wave from a window. People were so grateful for the deliveries, and I was thrilled that I was able to contribute.

This year I will be going to Fordham University in NYC, and I might not make it home for High Holidays (much to my mom's disappointment). Don't worry, I'll have time to deliver prayer books again before I leave – it brings me so much joy to give back to the community in that way. I'll still be blowing the shofar with my brother, as well as David and the other students and parents, so even though I'm going away, you haven't heard the last of me.



**Visit our website:**  
[etzchaimme.org](http://etzchaimme.org)

**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.

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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**

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## ***Our Wish to You***

***The entire leadership of  
Congregation Etz Chaim  
wishes you and your  
family a year of safety,  
good health, happiness  
and prosperity.***

## ***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:**

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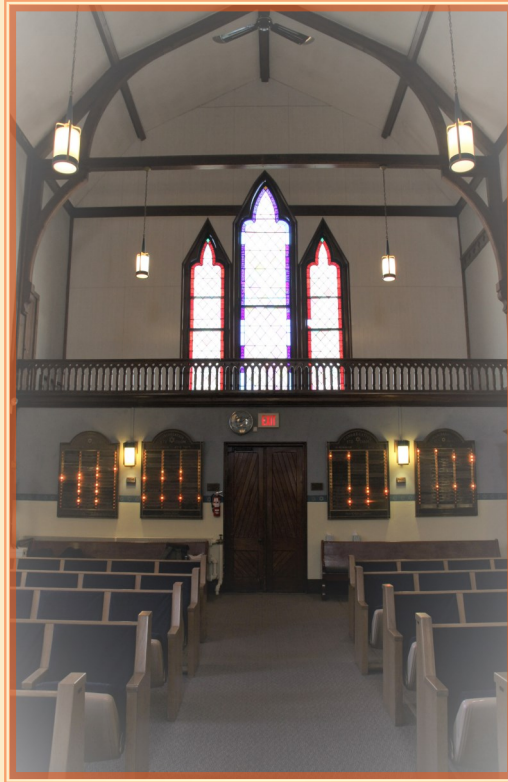
**967-5833**

**661-269-1233**

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## York County Jewish Community News



*Congregation Etz Chaim  
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