L'dor Vador

From Generation to Generation:
Beth El Celebrates 75 Years

Find out all the ways we’ll be celebrating on pg. 17!
WHO IS THE STAR OF THE PURIM STORY — Queen Esther?

Esther is one of the few biblical heroines whose story is actually written down, and told again and again — and she is noted for her heroic accomplishments. According to the Talmud, we have her story because she insisted on its preservation: “Esther wrote to the sages: ‘Establish me for all generations... Write me down for all generations’” (Megillah 7a). Important as Esther is, perhaps more significant to our generation is the mostly hidden story of Vashti, Esther’s predecessor as Queen of mythic Persia.

Vashti is the biblical exemplar for #MeToo, the woman who in ancient days had the courage to say “No.”

The prequel to the more famous story of Esther begins with a drunken feast by the foolish king, Ahasuerus. He summons his queen, Vashti, to come and dance before him and his buddies, wearing her royal crown (and, according to midrash, nothing else). Vashti refuses! Naomi Tucker, co-founder and Executive Director of Shalom Bayit, praises Vashti’s unheralded courage:

“You are the voice of every woman who has ever been humiliated, intimidated, coerced by a man who professed to love her. You are the spirit of every woman who has ever felt a stranger’s unwanted hands on her body. You are the essence of what so many women and girls wish they could do when they experience sexual harassment, assault, or the less obvious coercions from someone they know: say NO.”

You are the voice of every woman who has ever been humiliated, intimidated, coerced by a man who professed to love her. You are the spirit of every woman who has ever felt a stranger’s unwanted hands on her body. You are the essence of what so many women and girls wish they could do when they experience sexual harassment, assault, or the less obvious coercions from someone they know: say NO.

The men surrounding the king debate what is to be done and rule that Vashti must be banished. To do otherwise, they declare, would embolden other women to dare to refuse their husbands and “there will be no end of scorn or provocation!” Vashti’s behavior threatens not just her own relationship but the entire system; she must be cut off, lest others get the idea that they can have agency and resist oppressive, degrading or harmful relationships. The king promptly promulgates a law affirming that “every man should wield authority in his home” (Esther 1:22).

Why do women stay in abusive relationships? Why are young women reluctant to report exploitive or unwanted interactions and encounters? Vashti’s story helps us understand the answers. First, there are dire consequences to leaving, and, despite these consequences, many women do leave anyway. Many of us have internalized the lessons

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23
It's the Music...

By Allen Nudel, President of Beth El Board of Directors

I HOPE THE NEW DECADE IS OFF TO A GREAT START for you and your family. 2020 is going to be a big year for Congregation Beth El and I am feeling very energized and ready for the challenges.

Our family recently attended the Friday night Camp Kee Tov Reunion Shabbat event at Beth El. The traditional Friday night service was led by Rabbi Stern on acoustic guitar. Following the main parts of the service, a group of Camp Kee Tov counselors and alumni, joined by a few young Kee Tov campers, flooded the bimah to participate in the big service finale. Led by the rabbi, the entire group of young adults and campers sang the most popular Kee Tov songs, including “Devorah’s Song,” “B’tzelem Elohim,” “Heart of Mine,” and many others. While happily singing along, I couldn’t help but notice that most of the people who came out for this Camp Kee Tov Reunion Shabbat were not regular Shabbat service attendees. I understand that we all have busy lives, and that it is often tough to get to services, but what is it that attracts and motivates so many of these people to attend and participate in the Camp Kee Tov Shabbat service? Is it because it’s a reunion of old friends? Is it to support our youth? Is it because they haven’t been to services for a while? Or is it because it’s so fun to come together and sing for the evening? I propose that it’s the music.

For many of our young members, Camp Kee Tov is their main connection to Congregation Beth El, and in turn their connection to the larger Jewish community. Many teenagers and young adults are not in the right place to prioritize attending a traditional service on a somewhat regular basis. However, with the injection of joyful summer camp songs and the Camp Kee Tov ruach, there they are, rallying with their Jewish day camp friends and excited to be attending the reunion event. The Camp Kee Tov songs are so moving and joyful. Camp Kee Tov music not only feeds the soul, but it’s nostalgic — it takes Kee Tovers and their families back to those more carefree summer days when life was less hectic and stressful.

Music has always been an important part of my life. I obtained a little transistor radio when I was about six years old. Only getting AM stations, I would listen to 93 KHJ every minute I could. Of course, in those days, Top 40 stations would play all types of music, unlike the segmented types of stations we have today. They would play ABBA, then Earth, Wind & Fire, then Led Zeppelin, then Roseanne Cash. This type of music variety would be unheard of today outside of college radio. I would sing along to the songs and try to learn and understand the lyrics (particularly difficult for Elton John songs!). Pop music was an escape for me from the daily mundane activities of childhood. Music inevitably became a lifelong hobby of mine. In fact, while I write this, I am listening to the 1974 Billboard Top 100 Hits playlist on Spotify!

And so naturally, one of the things I like most about attending Jewish services is the music. Being the kind of person who sings along to every song on the car radio, I love the opportunity to sing along in public during the service without being the center of attention. Music truly permeates our skin and penetrates our souls. For most of us, music evokes emotions that don’t come out at any other time. During the High Holy Days, a highlight for me is when the entire congregation sings or hums along in unison. I get the same emotional feeling singing “Avinu Malkeinu” as I do singing along to Stevie Nicks.

Another favorite for me is the newly formed Fourth Fridays Musical Shabbat service. It is a beautifully designed music-filled event with the sanctuary chairs uniquely set up in concentric circles. All of the attendees, whether seated or standing and dancing, are facing inward towards each other with the many musicians at the center! This musical Shabbat has become a big draw for congregants. The wonderful volunteer musicians at this event (all are welcome to play!) are led by Cantor Elaya, while everyone else joins in singing along for over an hour of inspired tunes. If you haven’t been to a musical Shabbat, it’s a fantastic way to mark the last Friday of each month.

I always notice in myself and in others the positive effect that music has. A couple of years ago, I remember sitting at a bat mitzvah and taking in those in attendance. There was a woman in particular who caught my eye. She caught my eye because she was not at all engaged in the service. She sat with her arms folded in particular who caught my eye. She caught my eye because she was not at all engaged in the service. She sat with her arms folded in particular who caught my eye. She caught my eye because she was not at all engaged in the service. She sat with her arms folded in particular who caught my eye. She caught my eye because she was not at all engaged in the service. She sat with her arms folded in particular who caught my eye. She caught my eye because she was not at all engaged in the service. She sat with her arms folded in particular who caught my eye. She caught my eye because she was not at all engaged in the service. 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Things Are Not Always as They Seem

By David Rothenberg, Executive Director

IF YOU’RE LIKE ME — semi-learned, caring, handsome, humble, Jewish — you know that part of what Purim teaches us is that things are not always as they seem. This is as true today as it was in the time of Queen Esther, who succeeded Queen Vashti when she refused to show off her beauty for King Ahasuerus’s guests.

In the Midrash, Vashti is described as vain and wicked. In other interpretations, she’s viewed as an independent-minded heroine.

Things are not always as they seem.

I got an email the other day from RabbiKahn@TempleBethEl.com. According to the email, the rabbi was trapped in a train station somewhere in the Philadelphia suburbs; he’d misplaced his wallet, and needed me to wire him $650 so he could buy a plane ticket home. The rabbi lost his wallet? That I could believe. But $650 for a plane ticket from Philly? No way. That’s when I knew it was a phishing* scheme.

Things are not always as they seem.

“David, I need to tell you. I don’t know what’s up with [name withheld]. I just walked by him after Shabbat services and he looked at me like we’d never met, even though we’ve spoken numerous times. Is it me?” In a way, yes, it is you, because it’s not always about you. Sometimes people have had eye surgery recently, and their vision is temporarily impaired and you don’t know that. Sometimes a person is very, very shy, and you don’t know that either. Things are not always as they seem.

Those beautiful plants on the shelves in my office? Fake. Things are not always as they seem.

My brother, of blessed memory, died nine years ago from melanoma (skin cancer). A terrible way to go. He was young, we were very close and I had to help him die. After he passed, I cried just about every day for an entire year. Eventually I was able to get over my grief and focus on the wonderful memories we shared. It was great to be able to think about my brother without bawling.

I went for my annual skin-cancer check at the dermatologist last month. It was with a new doctor I hadn’t seen before.

“What brings you in today?”

“Just an annual skin cancer check-up,” I told the doctor.

“Do you have a family history of melanoma?”

“Uh….uh...” I lost it. I was not expecting to lose it, but I lost it. I did my best not to cry, but I couldn’t stop myself.

And not just a little sniff-sniff kind of crying: if a stranger had walked into the exam room at that moment, they would have thought the doctor just gave me some terrible diagnosis, or a really costly medical bill with a huge co-pay.

Things are not always as they seem.

What does it mean to be part of a community? Perhaps, in the beginning, we feel the most important thing is to find out what the community can do for me. But it’s more likely, in my learned and handsome opinion, that the path to happiness and fulfillment is easier to find when we start by asking what I can do for my community.

Things are not always as they seem.

* Phishing is when an evil-doer sends you an email that looks like it’s from someone you know, but it’s really not. At Beth El, we routinely receive phishing emails that appear to come from someone we know, asking for money and personal information. If you ever receive an email that appears to come from someone you know — a relative, friend or even a rabbi — and the email asks for personal information or for you to send them money under some kind of special circumstances, do not respond. If something looks even a little odd (or “phishy”), call or email the person at a number/email you know to be reliable. The Federal Trade Commission Consumer Information division, Comcast, and others have information available online about how to avoid phishing schemes.
The year was 1957 and Shabbat was in full swing at Camp Saratoga located in the Santa Cruz mountains (now in Santa Rosa and named Camp Newman). Campers, clergy and staff were dressed in white, and gathered for services on the bimah, a raised platform holding several benches. Magnificent redwoods overhead formed the roof. This communal coming together under the trees for prayer, music and reflection left an indelible impression on us as 15-year-olds. Now, more than 60 years later, we still remember the magic of that moment. We are not alone. Rabbi Kahn, who attended Camp Saratoga a few years later, cherishes the same precious memories.

Watching Beth El families gather outside on hay bales for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we wondered if we could replicate that Camp Saratoga magic on our own property. Could we have an outdoor gathering place for worship, study, and perhaps a wedding or two? Members and architects Alex Bergtraun and Jason Kaldis confirmed the viability of the idea and drafted consecutive plans. With the approval of the Board of Directors and the House Committee, ongoing support from Executive Director David Rothenberg, and input from staff, the project was launched. It has been our honor to contribute the necessary funds and guidance for this project.

Construction involved regrading of the area, and adding soil and rocks as well as pathways into the grove. The benches are made of high-grade cedar, supported by river rocks piled in gabion baskets. Two small benches just outside the gathering place provide a unique view of the setting and a space for reflection.

In honor of the 75th year of Congregation Beth El’s founding, the decision was made to name our new site the Founders Grove. A new plaque in the gallery lists the founders’ names including Mike’s parents — Gay and Kurt Austin.
As Jews, because of this history, we carry historical trauma. In a review of the literature on the subject, an article published by the US National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health defines the term as follows: “Historical trauma refers to a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance.” Because we know well the stories of oppression, persecution and prejudice of our Jewish ancestors from nearly everywhere we've lived for millennia, our fear and instinct for self-protection is easily triggered by the rise in anti-Semitic speech and violence in this country in recent days, months and years. These stories loom large in our awareness and lead us to ask big questions about our safety and our future in this country.

I recently had the good fortune to attend a conference put on by the Auburn Seminary, an organization whose mission is to engage in multifaith and multiracial work in order to “bridge religious divides, build community, pursue justice, and heal the world.” In one session, a Black woman who identified herself as a descendant of African slaves powerfully encouraged all of us there who carry historical trauma to remember that the fact that we are still here, generations later, means that we must therefore also bear deep ancestral wisdom that we might call historical resilience. We who have faced historical oppression and persecution for millennia also know not only how to survive but to thrive in difficult times. Resilience lives as deeply and powerfully inside of us as does the trauma. In the face of rising anti-Semitism, following are some assorted practices to remind ourselves of this resilience:

Live our Judaism out loud. Refuse to be pushed into hiding. In early January, the American Jewish Committee ran a campaign asking American Jews to publicly declare their Jewish identities by wearing a kippah, an item of jewelry or clothing with Jewish symbols, or by posting on social media with the hashtag #JewishandProud. Ultimately, when I got out of the car at that gas station in rural central California, though I hesitated, I did choose to wear my Kee Tov sweatshirt. I don’t want to live in a country in which I can’t publicly name my Jewish identity, so I have to act accordingly.

But living our Judaism proudly and visibly is not only about what we wear. It is, much more importantly, about how we act. We need to name — for ourselves and for others — that the values that guide our care and concern for our health, our earth, our wider human family, are Jewish values. We need to discuss this Jewish grounding with our elected officials and with law enforcement. They need to know who we are and understand our concerns, as Jews and as members of our wider community. Our moral compass is set by the Jewish emphasis on the importance of the collective.

And this moral compass guides us to get into deep and meaningful relationships with others across lines of difference. Our historical trauma sometimes makes us want to circle the wagons and turn inward during threatening times. But our historical resilience teaches us the power of reaching out with love in the face of threat, of holding on more tightly to our friends,

"Resilience lives as deeply and powerfully inside of us as does the trauma."
extended family and community members who are not Jewish, to share with them our fear and anguish so that we can, together, fight more powerfully against the forces of fear and hatred that seek to divide and destroy us. To this end, I encourage you to join our many ongoing Beth El interfaith efforts.

Members of Beth El are invited to participate in an ongoing interfaith discussion group, usually on the 3rd Thursday of each month, based in text study that uses Torah, Koran and New Testament, which rotates between Beth El, Netivot Shalom and the Pacifica Institute. If you’re interested in attending, please contact Caroline Lehman (camlehman@gmail.com). On Sunday March 29th at 2:00pm we have the next in our Building Bridges program, our ongoing relationship-building work with members of St. Paul AME Church and All Soul’s Episcopal Parish. This time we’ll gather for a film screening and discussion. I hope you’ll join us.

The role of the State of Israel on the world stage also has an impact on anti-Jewish sentiment. The only democratic opportunity that we, as American Jews, have to influence Israeli policy is to vote in the elections of the World Zionist Congress. These elections take place every five years; voting is now open and will close March 11th. Voting is an easy and meaningful way to address some of the root cause issues that fuel some forms of anti-Semitism in our country and across the world. As a member of the wider Reform Movement, we encourage you to vote the Reform slate, called ARZA. Find out more: azm.org/elections.

There are also many local organizations doing critical work to fight anti-Semitism. You might especially check out the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) or the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). We at Beth El are in regular contact with other local Jewish organizations and with law enforcement as we work together on the safety of our local Jewish community.

Finally, one of the most powerful acts of resistance we can do in the fight against anti-Semitism is to be actively engaged in our Jewish community. Celebrating Shabbat and holidays, deepening our Jewish learning and strengthening our connections with the other members of our community ground us more deeply in our knowledge of who we are, where we come from and what matters most to us as individuals. In an echo of Mordechai’s urgent words to Esther, we will not survive by hiding who we are. Rather, like Esther, from a place of personal and communal strength, together with friends across lines of difference who are likewise well-grounded in their own identities, we stand ready to face this challenging moment and to build a future in which no one is afraid to express any part of their identity in the public square.

Celebrate Purim in all its silliness!
Purim, Judaism’s silliest story and silliest day, falls on Monday evening, March 9 — please join our celebrations!

The Great Beth El TASCHEN-OFF 5780
Calling All Beth El Star Bakers!
Monday, March 9
6:15 pm Purim Dinner
7:15 pm Megillah Reading, bake off to follow...

We know you’ve got that scrumptious hamantaschen recipe you’ve been looking to impress everyone with. As part of our Purim celebration, we’ll have a Taschen-off to see who makes the best hamantaschen in all of Shushan (that’s Aramiac for the East Bay)!

The rules are simple:
1. Bake your favorite hamantaschen recipe.
2. No store-bought cookies for the competaschen, please.
3. You can use any fillings you like
4. Bring at least 12 of your treats to the Purim Celebration on March 9, along with an ingredients list
5. Mary Berry and Paul Hollywood are not expected, so voting will be by the attendees.
6. The winner will be crowned in glory, revered by all, and have bragging rights until Purim next year.

What are you waiting for? Ready. Set... Efuf! (Bake!!)

BENS Purim Parade
Tuesday, March 10, 9:00 am
All BENS friends, Katanchicks and Beth El “littles” (0-5 years old) and their grown-up(s) are invited to participate in our annual festive Purim costume parade. The parade will be followed by an age-appropriate Purim shpiel.

Kadima Purim Shpiel and Carnival
Thursday, March 5, 4:30 pm
All BENS and YAFE children are invited to their own Megillah reading, shpiel and carnival.

4:30 pm–Purim shpiel
4:50 pm–Carnival
5:40 pm–Purim songfest and hamantaschen

BENS Annual Hamantaschen Fundraiser
See page 8.
Ongoing Programs

As always, make sure to check the online calendar or weekly e-Update to confirm event dates and times.

**Hannah Arendt Reading Group**

First Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm: Join us in reading and discussing the writings of Hannah Arendt — acknowledged as one of the greatest political theorists of the 20th century. Those interested should contact Sandra Luft at sluft@sfsu.edu.

**Beth El Reading Group**

Saturdays at 12:30 pm: Our group is currently reading Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Please contact Basia Goddard at bashago1@gmail.com for further information.

**Life Stories**

First and Third Mondays at 2:30 pm and Second and Fourth Thursdays at 7:00 pm: An experiential writing group. Contact Marilyn Margulius at frontoffice@bethelberkeley.org for more information.

**Shabbat Poetry Group**

Fridays, 4:00 pm: Learn more about our poetry heritage in Beth El members’ homes. We read aloud one ancient and one modern Hebrew poem in translation. Lively discussions. For more information contact Florence Lewis at florencelewis@comcast.net.

**Talmud Study**

Fridays, 5:00 pm: Join us as we read Talmud in English in the Beth El library. If you’ve ever wondered about the Talmud, this study group is a great way to plunge right in. For more information contact Lisa Feldman at lisafeld@gmail.com.

**Torah Study**

Saturdays at 9:15 am: Each week a different congregational member presents her or his interpretation which is then followed by a lively discussion. Everyone is welcome, regardless of prior knowledge, background or religious orientation.

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**Musical Opportunities at Beth El**

There are plenty of opportunities to sing or play an instrument at Beth El in all our events. Please contact Cantor Elaya Jenkins-Adelberg at cantorelaya@bethelberkeley.org to find out more!

**Community Yom HaShoah Obsrance**

Monday, April 20, at 7:30 pm

Our annual commemoration of the Holocaust and resistance includes music, prayer, reflection and words of remembrance from a local Holocaust survivor. We continue our longstanding tradition of organizing this important event in partnership with Congregations Beth Israel and Netivot Shalom along with other Jewish community partners.

This year’s location:

Netivot Shalom 1316 University Ave, Berkeley, CA 94702

**2020 Hamantaschen Sales**

**Thursday, March 5**

**Friday, March 6**

**Monday, March 9**

**Tuesday, March 10**

Do you love these delicious triangle-shaped Purim cookies? Like many of us, are you too busy to bake? Have no fear! The Beth El Nursery School (BENS) parent community is at it again this year, baking and selling the beloved cookies. All proceeds benefit BENS! Keep an eye out for their booth in the courtyard at 3:30 pm on the above dates. Or, place your order ahead of time and pick up your hamantaschen in the front office between March 5 and 10 during regular business hours.

**Join Katanchicks: Beth El Nursery School’s Free-Range Littles Group**

Parent and baby (0-24 months) meet-ups: getting together to create community. The group is drop-in and free of charge, and gathers in the Beth El Children’s Library on **Thursdays, 9:30 am**. For more information, contact Juliet at juliet@bethelberkeley.org. All are welcome!

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**4th Friday—Shabbat in the Round**

**Band! Singers! Dinner!**

Join us at our monthly Shabbat-in-the-Round program on the Fourth Friday of the month as Beth El singers and musicians join Cantor Elaya Jenkins-Adelberg for a musical Shabbat celebration, followed by a catered dinner from local fave, Poulet.

**Friday, March 27, 6:15 pm**
**Friday, April 24, 6:15 pm**
**Friday, May 22, 6:15 pm**

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**Annual Meeting**

**Sunday, May 31, 10:30 am**

Beth El’s annual meeting will be held on Sunday, May 31st at 10:30 am. Come join us for brunching, schmoozing, President’s report on the State of the Synagogue, and Board of Directors installation. We look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting.

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**Dr. Aviva Zornberg:**

**Sing — Now! — To God! Miriam & Moses**

**Sunday, April 22, 7:00pm**

at Chochmat HaLev (2215 Prince St., Berkeley, CA 94609)

The history of Miriam, the prophet who speaks enviously of her brother Moses, offers an intimate glimpse of the tensions between brother and sister, both leaders, both prophets. Midrashic material will illuminate this mysterious relationship.

Dr. Avivah Zornberg is one of the most dynamic and compelling interpreters of the Bible alive. She weaves together ideas from literature, secular philosophy, psychology and the ancient teachers’ take on the texts. It is entirely engaging and built for the 21st century.

Zornberg’s books will be on sale at the event.
To register: [https://chochmat.org/events/aviva-zornberg/](https://chochmat.org/events/aviva-zornberg/)

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**Pesach Ruach!**

**Saturday, April 4, dinner at 5:00pm, followed by activity**

Join us for family-friendly activities for Pesach! Followed by dinner at 6:00 pm RSVP for Activities (Free!) and Dinner ($15/family) here:


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**National Refugee Shabbat**

**Friday, March 20, at 6:15 pm**

Over the Shabbat of March 20-21, Beth El will join the wider the American Jewish community in dedicating sacred time and space to refugees and asylum seekers as part of HIAS’ National Refugee Shabbat.

With more than 70 million people worldwide who have fled their homes due to persecution and violence, we are now witnesses to one of the largest humanitarian crises in human history. And, yet, in this moment of unprecedented need, the policies of the current administration are grinding the U.S. refugee admissions program to a halt, imposing extreme limits on the ability of asylum seekers to find safety in our country, and cutting humanitarian aid. This National Refugee Shabbat will be an opportunity to raise awareness in our community, to recognize the work that has been done, and to reaffirm our commitment to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers.

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**Shabbat Ruach!**

Join us for our regular Friday Shabbat Ruach catered dinner and music-filled, family-friendly Shabbat service on the following dates:

**Friday, March 13, 5:30 pm**
**Friday, May 8, 5:30 pm**
Since Fall 2018, Beth El has been supporting a tiny house project for unsheltered youth. You might wonder: How did we get involved? Is there a bigger picture? What’s next?

It began when Rabbi Stern convened the Tikkun Olam Leadership Team (TOLT) in 2016 with the goal of building capacity for our congregation to address social justice issues in a meaningful way as a community (Phase 1 of the Organizing Cycle — see graphic). We spent time learning about Beth El’s prior and current tikkun olam work, exploring our strengths, and crafting our vision and goals for tikkun olam at Beth El. In spring of 2018, we held Community Conversations (Phase 2) to speak with members of Beth El about tikkun olam. As a result of these conversations, we identified “issue areas” that our community was particularly energized to work on. Not surprisingly, many congregants named homelessness as one of their top issues. A few months later, during Yom Kippur afternoon programming, we chose to partner with Youth Spirit Artworks (Phase 3) on their tiny house project!

Since then, we’ve been building the tiny houses and continuing to advocate and educate (Phase 4). Beth El’s support for the YSA Tiny House Village for unsheltered youth has included:

- **Building houses** as part of an interfaith coalition, along with 30 other congregations.
- **Advocating** for the project, helping to secure funding by meeting with Berkeley and Oakland city councilmembers, attending City Council meetings, and initiating a postcard campaign. (Getting funding from the City of Berkeley has been especially challenging, so we’ve been learning about our city’s governance, funding, and meeting processes.)
- **Educating our congregation** about the issues, including a week of programming in April 2019 when we had a tiny house in Beth El’s courtyard, and we heard from YSA youth leaders about their experience with being unhoused.

On February 1, 2020, we held an event celebrating our progress (Phase 5). Our next step is to evaluate, explore, and plan what might be next for Beth El’s tikkun olam efforts.

We hope that you will help shape and participate in our next round of organizing! Building and strengthening relationships with one another, being in the same room, developing partnerships with other congregations and organizations — all these are central to successful faith-based organizing. For more information about the Tikkun Olam Leadership Team (or if you just want to hear about upcoming opportunities to participate in tikkun olam with the Beth El community), contact TOLT Co-Chairs Kellee Fong keeldawgs@sbcglobal.net or Nancy Turak at nancyabroad@gmail.com.
Q&A with Ruth Ehrenkrantz of Connections and Laura Turbow of Mitzvah Corps

**Ruth:** I sometimes hear about members at Beth El who might need a little help. How does Mitzvah Corps work?

**Laura:** We take requests directly from the rabbis. If you or someone you know is experiencing a challenge or a loss, please let the rabbis know. They will reach out to get pertinent information, and then let us know if Mitzvah Corps can be of assistance.

**Ruth:** So, if I hear that someone is having challenges, should I send the rabbis an email?

**Laura:** Yes. I think what keeps a congregation strong is a chain reaction of caring — people letting others know when help is needed for themselves or others. It is integral to a community that everyone feels supported. To that end, you just created a new group at Beth El that also supports our members. Tell me about “Connections.”

**Ruth:** Connections is a diverse group of older people in our Beth El community. They may be active or slowing down a bit, but everybody needs friendship and support. That is what we are trying to facilitate. Our programming takes place during the daylight hours as some people would prefer not to drive at night. We are also working on connecting with members individually, between our programs, through visits and phone calls. As Connections becomes more established, we are hoping to help foster relationships between younger families and elders in our community. We had BENS kids stop by our lunch in January, which was a really sweet start.

**Laura:** Mitzvah Corps volunteers fulfill requests like providing a ride to a medical appointment or making a meal for someone when they return from the hospital. How do you see Connections and Mitzvah Corps working together?

**Laura:** What kind of programming are you planning?

**Ruth:** We have lunch events on the third Friday of each month from September to June. Four times a year there will also be programmed luncheons. The programmed luncheons are a bit longer — ending at three o’clock. In January we tried a board game/schmoozing activity after the speaker to give people time to socialize. In the intervening months, we are offering the opportunity for people to socialize with people bringing bag lunches — these shorter gatherings are from 11:30 to 1:30.

**Laura:** Do you need volunteers?

**Ruth:** Yes! On the third Friday of each month we could use drivers to help some of our members get to the synagogue. And for our more formal programs, we need help setting up and cleaning up. Volunteers are welcome to stay for lunch.

**Laura:** Mitzvah Corps is also looking for people who want to help. We send out regular notices about people in our Beth El community who need assistance, from rides to help around the house. Contact Susan Zarchy (susanzarchy@gmail.com) to be put on our mailing list. I’m looking forward to the growing synergy between Connections and Mitzvah Corps!
Passover 5780

**PASSOVER BEGINS AT SUNDOWN ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8,** and ends Thursday evening, April 16. The first Passover seder is on the evening of April 8, and our Beth El Congregational Seder will take place on Thursday evening, April 9.

Passover is one of our most ancient celebrations. The origins of Passover lie in pre-Israelite spring celebrations of the first grain harvest and the births of the first lambs of the season. Thousands of years ago, Jews linked the renewal of spring with the people’s renewal in Torah’s story of the Exodus, when, at God’s instruction, Moses led the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt to freedom.

Together with Shavuot (the Festival of Weeks) and Sukkot (The Festival of Booths), Pesach is one of the ancient Israelite pilgrimage festivals, during which our people journeyed to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and renew their spiritual connections. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the focus of the Pesach celebration shifted to the seder meal.

During Passover, there is an affirmative instruction to “eat matzah” for the duration of the holiday and an injunction against eating “leavened bread” and food products; these are known as chametz.

The themes of Passover are ever-renewing—Where are we, as individuals and as members of larger groups, on our journeys of liberation and freedom? How does our own history of oppression and liberation inform our responsibilities towards those who are oppressed today? What internal leaven (ego and pride) do we need to discard in order to live with greater authenticity and truth in the world?

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**SECOND NIGHT CONGREGATIONAL SEDER**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 9, AT 6:00 PM**

Look for sign-up link in the e-Update or online at www.bethelberkeley.com/pesach.

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**Sell Your Chametz**

It is a tradition to clean and remove all chametz (leavened products; bread, crackers, pasta, etc.) from our homes before Pesach begins. (Many Reform Jews have a designated shelf or closet where chametz products go for the duration of the holiday.) Many Jews have the custom of “selling” any chametz that they own before the holiday begins.

The clergy will sell the synagogue’s chametz — and yours, too — in advance of Pesach. If you wish to participate, contact frontoffice@bethelberkeley.org or visit the Pesach page on the Beth El website for a very simple form. Fill it out, and email it or drop it off in the front office. If you have questions about your Pesach preparations, the clergy are happy to help.

*Chag sameach!* 

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**SECOND NIGHT CONGREGATIONAL SEDER**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 9, AT 6:00 PM**

Look for sign-up link in the e-Update or online at www.bethelberkeley.com/pesach.
I am the youngest child in my family and the youngest grandchild on both sides. My grandparents were well into their seventies when I was born. They lived far away in a tiny college town in northwestern Wisconsin; they didn’t travel, and our visits with them tended to be short trips between summer camp and school. I remember many things about them: my grandfather’s love for books and crossword puzzles and my grandma’s passion for cooking and baking — she taught me to make mashed potatoes and rhubarb pie. But mostly, I remember the stories they told and the fact that they were old. I was always envious of friends who had their grandparents nearby and got to spend holidays, birthdays and everyday moments with them. How I wished I had that too.

I absolutely love seeing the grandparents involved with their grandchildren at BENS. I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know many Bubbies, Zaydes, Sabas, Savtas, Nanas, Pop-pops, Grans, Dedas, Omis and Opas over the years; some from overseas and some from right around the corner. It is so heart-warming to welcome them and have them become part of our school and to witness how important they are in their grandchildren’s lives and vice versa: how they interact and benefit from being together. All of these relationships are really quite spiritual.

Passing down culture and knowledge from the elders to the young’uns goes back to the time of the Torah. Making intergenerational connections is becoming more and more important to aid in the social and emotional health of both constituents. As young children interact, create and play with senior adults, they acquire “generational intelligence.” Children build social skills, an increased sense of community service, and positive attitudes toward aging, and learn the mitzvah of kibbud zekaynim, honoring elders and reduced ageism. By interacting with children, older adults find a greater sense of purpose, delayed mental decline, even lower blood pressure and risk of disease. Giving and caring for others are values we teach every day at BENS.

This year we are embarking on a partnership with the Connections Group at Beth El. Our teaching team is actively planning ways to engage our young and older learners together. We started off by making Tu B’Shevat treats for the Connections January activity. We plan to join them in some creative art expressions and will invite them to be part of our Hamantaschen Baking Fundraiser. We are sure the children will learn many things during their interactions with the group. The engagement pieces that we are planning are activities that the children are familiar with, resonate with both young and old, and, most importantly, emphasize the process over the product, exploring common interests and finding friendships.

I believe that older and younger people sharing time together is necessary for human experience. It is vital to pass on culture and traditions and values from generation to generation. I am so fortunate to be a part of this community that makes these intergenerational connections.
The congregation is cordially invited to attend the service and kiddush following to honor these bar and bat mitzvah candidates:

**JONAH MAPES** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **March 14, 2020**. Jonah is the son of Dena and Eric Mapes.

**CLARA COHEN** will be called to the Torah as a bat mitzvah on **March 28, 2020**. Clara is the daughter of Sara Beliveau and Andrew Cohen.

**JAKE FIEDOTIN** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **April 4, 2020**. Jake is the son of Norma Fiedotin.

**ARI OSHRY** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **April 18, 2020**. Ari is the son of Alison Fisher and Matt Oshry.

**JOSS MEIR** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **April 25, 2020**. Joss is the son of Donna Friedman Meir and Gadi Meir.

**JACOB GOLDMAN** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **May 2, 2020**. Jacob is the son of Sarah Crow and Raphael Goldman.

**REBECCA CAPARAZ** will be called to the Torah as a bat mitzvah on **May 9, 2020**. Rebecca is the daughter of Debbie Rosenfeld-Caparaz and Dean Caparaz.

**SAM ROTHSTEIN** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **May 16, 2020**. Sam is the son of Jesse and Joanie Rothstein.

**EVAN MOGULOF** will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on **May 30, 2020**. Evan is the son of Anne Wolf and Dan Mogulof.

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**DON'T WAIT TO SIGN YOUR KIDS UP FOR**

**CAMP KEE TOV 2020!**

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Wars character. Putting on a costume can reveal a true part of ourselves. The custom of wearing costumes on Purim is an allusion to the nature of the Purim miracle, where the details of the story are really miracles hidden within natural events.

Certainly one of the best parts of dress up and imaginary play is that you get to express a myriad of sides of yourself. Recently I was interviewing our students and I asked them what they liked best about coming to our YAFE programs. So many of the students said that they get to be themselves here. They didn’t have to act cool, or be mean for their friends to think they were cool. They could show their individuality and still find a friend group to connect with. I want our school to be a safe space where students can bring their whole selves. One of the painful aspects of the Purim story is how Esther had to hide her Jewishness in order to be safe. I don’t want our students to feel they have to hide anything, whether it be their values, fears, gender pronouns or perceptions of G-d.

The beauty of the Megillah is that every child can see an aspect of themselves in the Purim story. They can be brave like Esther or Mordechai, defiant and proud like Vashti, or confused about what is the right moral choice like King Ahashverosh. Sadly, the world continues to create a climate where we are afraid to be our true selves. We may feel that hiding is the only path to real safety. The Purim story reminds us that defiantly stating who we are is a path to justice and righteousness.

The themes of Purim followed me through my adult years. I continue to love dress up (at least in the shoe department), and I studied the importance of dramatic play for children when I got my MA in Drama Therapy. Working as a drama therapist and longtime Jewish educator has taught me the importance of imaginary play for children. One definition of imaginary play is when children are role playing and acting out various experiences they may have had or something that is of interest to them. They are experimenting with decision-making on how to behave, and are also practicing their social skills. We provide many opportunities for our young people to have imaginative play. We do a lot of living history in our classes where they travel back in time to learn about Jewish immigration stories or act out selling pita at a shuk (open market).

A midrash about Purim says that the costumes we wear can represent aspects of ourselves that we might not always show to the world. Jung would say, we get to expose our shadow sides, but I think when children do dress up, they are showing many different aspects of themselves: the good, the bad and the Star Wars character. Acting in the Purim spiel, winning prizes at the carnival and hearing the Megillah read were highlights of my year.

I loved dress up as a child and all the elements related to Purim. Okay, true confession: I have never been a huge fan of hamantaschen, but everything else I LOVED. Acting in the Purim spiel, winning prizes at the carnival and hearing the Megillah read were highlights of my year.

The most anticipated event of my childhood years was the Purim carnival at Congregation Beth El and the costumes my mom would make for me. I loved dress up as a child and all the elements related to Purim. Recently I was interviewing our students and I asked them what they liked best about coming to our YAFE programs. So many of the students said that they get to be themselves here. They didn’t have to act cool, or be mean for their friends to think they were cool. They could show their individuality and still find a friend group to connect with. I want our school to be a safe space where students can bring their whole selves. One of the painful aspects of the Purim story is how Esther had to hide her Jewishness in order to be safe. I don’t want our students to feel they have to hide anything, whether it be their values, fears, gender pronouns or perceptions of G-d.

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IRAC’s resolution for 2020 is to keep up the fight for equality and pluralism and to preserve Israel’s democracy. Contributions from Beth El members help IRAC fight for freedom of religion and conscience, human equality, social justice, religious tolerance and individual rights. Here is a partial list of IRAC’s 2019 accomplishments:

1. The Ministry of Religious Services announced that they would fund a civil cemetery in Jerusalem.
2. Reform and Conservative rabbis in cities will begin to receive state funding towards their salaries.
3. Signs discriminating against Arabs and other minorities were removed from Jerusalem preschools and kindergartens, and the language of the discriminatory policy was changed.
4. IRAC filed over 100 petitions to defend the rights of potential immigrants and won 90 percent of them.
5. IRAC assisted over 250 people in registering their Reform conversions with the Israeli Population Registry.
6. A court ruling provides for municipal funding of cultural and holiday events sponsored by the Reform movement in the public domain in Jerusalem.
7. IRAC led the fight for the rights of battered foreign spouses to stay in Israel on humanitarian grounds. This case was recognized as one of the Supreme Court’s leading cases of the year.

In 2020, IRAC will continue to advocate for democracy, equality and justice in Israel and to be a strong and consistent reminder that there is more than one way to be Jewish — and that all Jews should be welcome in Israel.

Through our donations, we have the opportunity to help create a more broadly inclusive Israeli democracy based on the principles of social justice and equality. Please consider donating to IRAC at their website www.irac.org or with your membership renewal form.

To find out more about IRAC, visit the website and sign up for their email newsletter “The Pluralist.”
Join us in Celebrating 75 Years as a Community

Memberpalooza, May 1–3, 2020: A Friday night dinner, Saturday night havdalah or a potluck Sunday brunch in the park? Perhaps an afternoon family hike, game of ultimate frisbee, brown bag wine tasting or poker night? May 1st–3rd will be a weekend of community building in honor of Beth El’s 75th Anniversary. We’re organizing a series of small gatherings hosted by Beth El members with the explicit goal of helping members meet and get to know one another and we need you to help us by signing up to be a host. The type of gathering is up to you! Our goal is that we each expand our Beth El circle just a bit and help everyone get to know a few additional Beth El members over the course of the weekend. Create and host an event for people with interests or tastes similar to yours. Attend an event with people you don’t already know. We encourage every Beth El family to either host or attend one of these gatherings. Or do both! Sign up to host at http://www.bethelberkeley.org/memberpalooza.

Nosh & Knowledge: A Day of Learning with Our Members, May 31, 2020: Come for a special brunch and the 75th Annual Meeting of Congregation Beth El in the morning; stay for an afternoon of short presentations from some of our own Beth El members about their interests, passions, and research.

Founders Grove Dedication, June 12, 2020: In honor of our 75th Anniversary, we will dedicate our new outdoor worship space with Friday night Shabbat services, and, of course, food.

75th Anniversary Weekend, Nov. 13–15, 2020: Congregation Beth El was founded on November 15, 1945. To celebrate, we are having a full weekend of celebration. Join us on Friday evening for a catered, celebratory dinner and a special Shabbat evening service featuring the liturgy and music of Beth El across the years. On Saturday night, we will feature Havdalah and a trivia night suitable for all generations. And to cap it off, Sunday morning we will have a bagel brunch followed by a structured learning and conversations with our clergy about honoring tradition, celebrating diversity, and building a Jewish future.

75th Anniversary Elana Arian Concert, December 12, 2020: Come celebrate our anniversary Chanukah with a special concert featuring the musical gifts and leadership of Jewish singer-songwriter Elana Arian! She is an extremely versatile, talented and authentic Jewish composer and musician, whose music feels fresh and familiar at the same time. Her music is warm and accessible to children and adults of all ages.

Sing-Along Fiddler on the Roof, January 3, 2021: Tradition!

Culture, Arts and Creativity at Beth El, March 12–14, 2021: We’ll showcase the composers, filmmakers, artists and writers of our community in a weekend where there will be something for everybody.

Beth El at 150 (Ongoing project): Virtual Synagogue? Intergalactic Gatherings? Personalized Prayer Books? Rabbi Kahn’s Avatar Returns? Beth El’s 75th Anniversary is the perfect time to start visioning what we think Beth El and larger Jewish community might look like at our 150th Anniversary. Looking to both the past and the future, our whole community will come together to share stories, images, objects, poems, etc. that represent where we’ve been and where we’re going. The project will kick off through Kadima this year and be highlighted as part of the Celebration of Education in May, continue as a Yom Kippur workshop, and culminate, we hope, in the burying of a time capsule somewhere within our beautiful grounds. Today’s BENS kids will be our community’s elders at our 150th, so it’s not that far away...start imagining our future today!

Please see — https://www.bethelberkeley.org/75th-anniversary-celebration for the most up-to-date information about Beth El’s 75th Anniversary Celebration!
In my Torah portion there are parts where parents do or do not make decisions for their children. For example, Abraham chooses a lot for Isaac. He chooses where his wife will be from and where he will live. He also chooses how Isaac’s wife will be selected. In these decisions Isaac has no say. In Genesis, chapter 24, verse 4, Abraham tells his head servant several things. First he tells him “...you shall go to my land, my birthplace, and get a wife for my son Isaac.” Later, in verse 6, he also tells him “Take great care not to bring my son back there” [to his birthplace]. Abraham is an example of a parent who makes a lot of decisions for his child, without consulting his child.

On the other hand, Rebekah does get a say in some matters. For example, the morning after the servant comes to her family’s house to ask for her to return with him to be Isaac’s wife, Rebekah’s brother and mother give her the choice of whether or not to go with him. In Genesis, chapter 24, verse 58, her brother and mother ask her, “Will you go with this man?” This is saying that Rebekah gets a choice of whether to go with this man and meet Isaac and marry him. When she says yes, she’s not only choosing to marry Isaac, she’s also choosing to move to Canaan where Isaac lives. Isaac’s father and Rebekah’s mother are two examples of parents faced with making big decisions for their children, and dealing with it very differently.

Even though Rebekah’s and Isaac’s parents had very different roles in the marriage decision, from what we can tell from the text, Isaac and Rebekah ended up being happy to marry each other. The text doesn’t tell us exactly how Rebekah felt about marrying Isaac but we can find hints that she was probably happy with the outcome of the marriage. For example, she agreed to go with the servant to meet Isaac in the first place. Also, when they first met, Rebekah seems to have been excited to meet Isaac and she “fell off her camel” when she first saw him. In Ibn Ezra’s commentary, he said that Rebekah’s fall was intentional and that it was meant as a sign of respect, but in a more “Rom Com-style” explanation we could imagine that she was so excited to see Isaac that she actually fell off her camel. Unlike with Rebekah, the text tells us exactly how Isaac felt about their marriage. In chapter 24, verse 67, it says “she became his wife and he loved her. Thus did Isaac take comfort after the death of his mother.” This shows that even though the parents had very different roles, and Isaac and Rebekah had different roles in the decision to be married, they were both happy with the outcome.

The question of when it is right and fair for parents to make decisions for their children is especially relevant today, as I become bat mitzvah. Historically, when a boy turned 13, the father said a blessing that is first cited in Genesis Rabbah — an early rabbincic commentary: “Blessed is God who has freed me from responsibility for this boy.” That makes it seem like the bat or bar mitzvah flips a switch and turns a child into an adult, so parents are no longer responsible for them, a sudden change, but I think becoming a bar mitzvah is more like a stepping stone. My parents are not going to be entirely free from responsibility for me after today. But today I already make a lot more decisions for myself than when I was younger. I choose what sports I play, what camps I go to, what clothing I wear. Also, some things my parents used to decide, we now decide together, like what time I go to sleep, what electives I take, and how much screen time I get. But there are some things that my parents decide without me, like where we live and where I go to school. As a child gets older, they get to make more decisions for themselves than when they were young. As I grow older, I will be a part of more decisions and be able to make more decisions for myself.

One example of a big decision in my life was deciding whether or not to have a bat mitzvah. It was partly my decision but mostly my parents’ decision. My mom had a bat mitzvah and she wanted me to have one also. I knew for a long time that I was expected to do it, partly because I have been going to Hebrew school since I was in second grade. If I had decided that I really really didn’t want to do it, I wouldn’t have had to. I decided I was good with it. Having a bat mitzvah is a big decision that I was a big part of.

One of the Ten Commandments talks about respecting your parents. When you are younger and your parents make decisions for you, part of respecting them is respecting the decisions they make. So, for example, if a child wanted to watch a TV program and the parents said no because the child had already watched a lot of TV that day, the child could respect the decision, saying okay, and finding something else to do. As you get older and you make more decisions for yourself, you can still respect your parents by making decisions that you think they would be happy with (or by asking them for their advice, even if you are making the final decision yourself). At some point, when your parents are much older, you might have to help them with their decisions about themselves. In my Torah portion, Abraham was quite old, but he seemed to still be making decisions for himself and even for Isaac.
Sometimes parents make really big decisions for their children, like the mothers and fathers from other countries who brought their children with them when they came to the United States without papers. Many of these children grew up in America without knowing they were not United States citizens until they were teenagers. An Anti-Defamation League article about the issues facing DREAMers explains that often these children of undocumented immigrants only learn about their status “when they discovered they couldn’t join their peers in getting a driver’s license or filling out financial aid forms for college because they didn’t have Social Security numbers.” There are 800,000 such children in the US today, and they are called DREAMers.

Now, Congress and the President need to decide whether or not it matters that DREAMers are in the United States because of their parents’ decision. When some people think about the DREAMers, they see the decisions that their parents made for them. They do not see the decisions that the DREAMers made for themselves, like getting jobs and going to school and obeying the law. I think that Congress should look at more than the decision that the DREAMers’ parents made for their children 10 or 15 years ago, when the DREAMers may have only been babies. That’s what Congress tried to do when it introduced the “Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act” or the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act would have provided a pathway to U.S. citizenship to certain undocumented youth who go to college and/or serve in the military while maintaining a good record. That would put these kids’ fate in their own hands and reward them for making good decisions.

The story of Rebekah and Isaac is about a lot of things, but what struck me was who was making the decisions for whom. Abraham was making decisions for himself and his adult son, but Rebekah was making decisions for herself. What I’ve seen in my life is that as I get older, I get to be a part of more decisions. It seems to me that over time I will be judged by others based on the decisions I’ve made for myself — just as I hope the DREAMers are judged for their own decisions and not those that were made for them. I hope that when you consider other peoples’ choices, you will work to separate the decisions that people make for themselves from those that their parents make for them.

Kein y’hi ratson. So may it be. Amen.

Chant Torah Like a Pro!

**HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO LEARN HOW TO CHANT TORAH?**

Learn how in a comfortable atmosphere in an accessible way, with your fellow congregants and Cantor! Join us on the following Saturdays at 1:30 pm:

March 7; March 14; March 21; March 28; April 4; April 18; April 25; May 2; May 9

All teens and adult congregants are welcome! Reach out to Cantor Elaya at cantorelaya@bethelberkeley.org if you have any questions.

Musical Opportunities

There are plenty of opportunities to sing or play an instrument at Beth El in all our events. Please contact Cantor Elaya at cantorelaya@bethelberkeley.org to find out more!
.launches his monumental translation of the entire Bible into English, the only person ever to do this alone and said by many to be the best ever, explains how he did it in The Art of Bible Translation. Alter gives a personal and passionate account of what he learned over the two decades he spent in the work, explaining with many concrete examples the choices to be made; comparing other translations, good and bad; and discussing the principal aspects of style in the Hebrew Bible that any translator should try to reproduce: word choice, syntax, word play and sound play, rhythm and dialogue. Along the way he offers insights about the art of translation beyond the Bible.

One of the good examples of translation Alter points to is that of the Bible into German by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. This is described in a new biography, Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent, by Paul Mendes-Flohr, a volume in the Yale series of Jewish Lives. Buber, most famously the author of I and Thou, made significant contributions to religious and Jewish thought, philosophical anthropology, biblical studies, political theory, and Zionism. Here, the best authority on his life offers what Amir Eshel of Stanford calls an “exquisite biography...the best account to date of the life and work of one of the most distinguished modern Jewish thinkers.”

Alter, in his book on modern literature in Hebrew before Hebrew became anyone’s first language, noted especially the great poet who is the subject of another Yale Jewish Lives biography, Hayim Nahman Bialik, Poet of Hebrew, by Avner Holtzman, Professor of Hebrew Literature at Tel Aviv University. By the time he was 28, in 1901, Bialik was already considered the National Hebrew Poet upon publication of his poems in Warsaw. He led a turbulent life: born in Ukraine, studying in Lithuania, becoming a close friend of Ahad Ha’am, settling in Odessa, undergoing pogroms, Russian Revolution and Civil War while publishing poetry and The Book of Legends (which is in our library), being an active Zionist, and speaking at the inauguration of Hebrew University after making Aliyah in 1924. Upon his sudden death in 1934, the leading newspaper of Jewish Palestine头lined, “Israel Is Orphaned: Hayim Nahman Bialik Is Gone.”

A Beth El bat mitzvah, assigned a Leviticus portion, asked “Why is Leviticus even in the Bible?” An answer is given in a feminist commentary, Leviticus, by S. Tamar Kamionkowski, professor of biblical studies at a rabbinical college. She shows how gender dynamics shift between the static world view of P (Lev. 1-16) and the dynamic approach of H (Lev. 17-26), expanding holiness from the priests to the people, from Temple to the Land, and complicating associations between power and gender dynamics. The chapter on Leviticus 27 is entitled “How Much Is a Woman Really Worth?”

“Is laughter essential to Jewish identity?” This question and many others are answered in Typically Jewish, by Nancy Kalikow Maxwell, who tells here how Jews feel, think, act, love and live. Another question: Why is Kaddish at the end of the service? Answer: It forces secular Jews to stay a captive audience through the whole service. Maggie Anton calls this book a “humorous safari to observe Jews in their natural habitat...Jews who love learning — in other words, all of us — will delight in learning a lot. I definitely did.”

Halakhah is sometimes considered a zillion rules on such aspects of life as how many hairpins a woman can wear on Shabbat or whether broccoli can ever be kosher. A completely different picture is presented in Halakhah: The Rabbinic Idea of Law, by Chaim Saiman, a brilliant book inviting re-reading that guides readers across two millennia of richly illuminating perspectives, showing how halakhah is not just “law” but an entire way of thinking, being and knowing. Moshe Halbertal calls it “a compelling and original exposition of the unique nature of halakhah.” Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks calls it “a genuinely enthralling book...superb, much-needed, and enlightening.” Others: “pellucid and captivating book,” “enlightening,” and “this is a terrific book.” It is.
The children’s library has expanded! What was the “young adult” section is now called “teen.” No longer are the shelves filled with toys, but with novels, including graphic novels, biographies, and reference books. Please come and check out the wonderful selection of books!

**Several new graphic novels:**

Dr. Ruth Westheimer relates her tumultuous life to her grandchildren in *Rollercoaster Grandma: The Amazing Story of Dr. Ruth*. From a Holocaust survivor to a well-known TV personality, Dr. Westheimer’s life is one of courage and determination. Beautifully illustrated in black-and-white and color.

*Rabbi Harvey Rides Again: A Graphic Novel of Jewish Folktales Let Loose in the Wild West* by Steve Sheinkin is a follow-up to *The Adventures of Rabbi Harvey: A Graphic Novel of Jewish Wisdom and Wit in the Wild West*. The ten entertaining stories are filled with humor and wit.

Everything you want to know about Pirkei Avot is in *The Illustrated Pirkei Avot: A Graphic Novel of Jewish Ethics* by Jessica Tamar Deutsch. Children and adults will enjoy this first-of-its-kind book.

**New for Passover in the children’s section:**

It’s almost time for the seder to begin and Pippa, the mouse, cannot find her seder plate. Told in rhyme and repetition, *Pippa’s Passover Plate* by Vivian Kirkfeld with whimsical illustrations is a very sweet story. Ages 4–6.


For the first time Marcy is old enough to ask the four questions in *The Best Four Questions* by Rachelle Burk. Before she asks the questions, she makes up her own original ones which are very funny! A delightful book with colorful and bold illustrations by Mélanie Florian. Ages 4–7.

*Passover Around the World* by award-winning author, Tami Lehman-Wilzig takes the reader to various countries, learning about their unique Passover rituals and traditions. Beautifully illustrated by Elizabeth Wolf, this is a must read for ages 8 and up!

Young children will be engaged at the Seder with *Uncle Eli’s Passover Haggadah* by Eliezer Lorne Segal. The vivid and lively illustrations by Bonnie Gordon-Lucas combined with the silly rhymes and characters will make a child’s seder experience unforgettable. Ages 4–7.

Abby Levine’s *This Is the Matzah*, with illustrations by Paige Billin-Frye, is a good introduction to Passover for younger children. Each page has a rhyming text telling the story of Passover leading up to the seder. Ages 4–7.

**Other new books:**

Every year on his birthday, David receives a white shirt from his grandmother that he abhors. Find out what happens when David rebels and does not accept the “surprise” from his grandmother in Cary Fagan’s *My New Shirt*. A very hilarious book for ages 5–8.

In *Lotty’s Lace Tablecloth (Jewish Heirloom Stories)*, Tami Lehman-Wilzig tells the story of the beautiful Shabbat tablecloth that her great-grandmother made. The detailed drawings contribute to make this a very captivating story for ages 7–10.

During the week, the Schmutzy children (*schmutz* is Yiddish for “dirt”) are encouraged by their mother to be creative and make a mess. However, before Shabbat arrives, the children know that they have a responsibility to clean up in *The Schmutzy Family* by Madelyn Rosenberg with illustrations by Paul Meisel. Ages 4–6.

Translated from French, *The Lion and the Bird* by Marianne Dubuc is an endearing story of the friendship between these unlikely creatures. Illustrated in colors of gray and blue, with minimum text on each page, for ages 4–8.

With the help of Lena, “the aspiring young detective,” we learn and understand the many jobs that a rabbi has in Leslie Kimmelman’s *The Rabbi Slurps Spaghetti*. All young children should become familiar with this book!
This is a modification of a recipe for soft-shell crab from The New York Times. I keep preserved lemons in a small jar in the refrigerator (recipe to follow), but you can use grated lemon zest and lemon juice to achieve a similar effect. You can halve the recipe by halving the amount of fish but don’t reduce the amount of sauce.

**INGREDIENTS**

- ½ cup flour
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 shakes cayenne, or more to taste
- 2 teaspoons paprika, plain or smoked
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 ½ pounds sole filets
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 5 tablespoons butter, divided
- ½ cup sliced almonds
- 2 tablespoons diced preserved lemon, or 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest and 2 tablespoons lemon juice and extra salt
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Prepare flour for dredging: combine on a plate flour and spices. Don’t dredge the sole in advance or it will get sticky.
2. Put olive oil and 2 tablespoons of butter in a large wide skillet over medium heat. Dredge sole in spiced flour and cook about 2 minutes per side. Remove to a plate and keep warm.
3. Add 3 more tablespoons of butter to the pan to melt. Add the sliced almonds and stir until lightly browned, 2–3 minutes. Add the cilantro and the preserved lemon or lemon zest, lemon juice and salt.
4. Spoon the sauce over the sole and serve immediately.

Serves 4

Time: 20 minutes

**PRESERVED LEMONS**

There are many versions of this recipe on the internet, but this one by Paula Wolfert is my favorite. I have a Meyer lemon tree, so whenever I’m running low, I pick four lemons and make a new batch. It lasts a very long time in the fridge.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 Meyer lemons, scrubbed and dried
- 2–3 lemons, juiced to make ½ cup
- 2 tablespoons salt

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Scrub and dry 2 lemons. Juice the other lemons and set the juice aside.
2. Take out a glass jar large enough to hold the two lemons, usually a 2-cup jar works.
3. Cut the 2 dry lemons into quarters, keeping them attached by the stem end.
4. Over the jar or a plate, open the lemons a little and pour 1 tablespoon of salt into each. Place them in the glass jar, pressing down if you need to. Pour any salt that fell onto the plate into the jar.
5. Pour the juice over the lemons, place the top on the jar and turn it upside down and right side up.
6. Leave the jar out and turn it daily for a week.
7. Refrigerate.
8. To use, take out 1 or 2 quarters as required. Rinse and discard the pulp before using.

Each quarter makes about 1 tablespoon chopped.

Time: active 15 minutes
taught by the king’s court: Refuse and you will be punished. Leave and you will be banished. Speak out, and you may be ostracized. Most people won’t believe you because your ex was so well loved in the community and is such a mensch, after all. You will be alone. With luck, after a lengthy divorce process, you’ll hopefully have custody of your children. But, like Vashti, you will be free to shape your own life — but perhaps needing to start over with new friends, a new, less desirable living situation, and perhaps an entirely new community.

Ultimately, asking “why don’t women just leave” is entirely the wrong question, because it blames the victim for the abuse that is perpetrated against her. Perhaps better questions would be: Why are so many women unsafe in their own homes? Why are so many teens unsafe at parties at their own good friends’ houses? Why are so many abusers allowed to get away with their behavior? Why don’t we, as a community, do more to stop them?

So as Purim approaches, let us ask ourselves: Who are the Vashtis we know? Who are the brave women who say no to unwanted sexual advances, who fear the power of their own husbands or partners, who can only escape public humiliation by risking their lives and communities to say NO to a tyrant who was supposed to protect them? Who are the women hiding, afraid to admit that they are living with a tyrant? As we put on our Purim masks, let’s ask: What are the masks some women feel they must wear all the time, pretending to a lead happy family life? What can we do to make our community a safer place for them to tell their stories and get the help they deserve? What is the cost to our entire community when violence and abuse are tolerated in our midst?

Purim is a time for celebration, for the Megillah tells us that we were victorious on that day. As we celebrate one kind of liberation from the hands of Haman, let us not forget that it was women’s strength and resistance that brought us there. Let’s lift up and honor Vashti, punished for disobedience. Let’s lift up and remember Esther, who lived in privilege, but at a cost. These daring and courageous women represent the difficult choices many women make each day: to protect themselves, to protect their children, to retain dignity in the face of oppression and terror.

Shalom Bayit is the Bay Area Jewish community’s agency dedicated to ending domestic violence in Jewish homes. If you need help, please call Shalom Bayit at 866-742-5667. To learn more about their work with families, youth and the community, visit shalom-bayit.org.

This column is adapted from a drash written by Naomi Tucker in 2008; used with permission.
Annual Appeal 5780

We gratefully acknowledge all the donors who have given to this year’s Annual Appeal so far. As you consider your own gift this year, know that a group of generous members of our community have created a matching pool to incentivize new donors, people who increase their pledges from last year, and overall giving. Please help us make our annual appeal a success. Donate now at: www.bethelberkeley.org/give/donate.

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You can celebrate your simcha or remember loved ones with your Beth El community by hosting a Shabbat Oneg on a Friday night or Shabbat morning. Your sponsorship will be acknowledged in the e-Update and from the bimah. Beth El members will be able to join you in your celebration or to honor the memory of your loved ones. Please go to our website and click on “Ways to Give” and then “Oneg Sponsorship.” Read the description of how to sign up, then follow the link to select your menu choices and make payment. Your donation to Beth El will cover the cost of food, preparation, serving, and cleanup, and will help support our programs. To speak to someone regarding oneg sponsorship, please contact the front office at Beth El at frontoffice@bethelberkeley.org.

Scenes from "Diamonds Are Forever," Beth El's 75th Anniversary Gala
Photography by Shoey Sindel
shoeysindel.com
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From candles, mezuzot and jewelry to thank-you and birthday presents for kids, the Beth El Gift Shop carries the best selection of things you need to make the holidays and milestones in your Jewish life memorable.

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