



**A Welcoming Reform Jewish Congregation serving  
Chantilly, Virginia and the surrounding area.**



[www.bethtorah.net](http://www.bethtorah.net)

**February 2021**

**Shevat 5781-Adar 5781**

## **In 2020, We Became a Virtual TBT family**

In March 2020, we closed our physical space to protect the health of our congregation during the COVID pandemic. We moved our Shabbat Services, our Religious School, our B'Nai Mitzvahs, our High Holidays, our lifelong learning, our book club, our board and committee meetings and our social connections online using Zoom.

We've learned now to mute our microphones, share our screens, and change our backgrounds. Most importantly, we've stayed connected as a congregation.

As we continue to plan for 2021, we will make decisions based on the best advice on how to keep our congregation safe. We hope that soon we can be together in our Sanctuary, sharing real hugs. In the meantime, check the Blast for Zoom links to our weekly events and join us.

### **A Virtual TBT Chanukah**

For eight nights, the TBT family came together to light candles. On the sixth night, Cantor Lauren lead us in a spirited sing-along of some oldies and fun new songs. A different family lead the candle lighting each night, and many of our religious school students lead the prayers.



For Chanukah in the Tavern, on the last night of Chanukah, we had special Zoom backgrounds.



## Temple Beth Torah

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Membership	Jessica Pimental
Events	Pamela Fisher
Marketing	Brad Levin
Member at Large	Andrew Heifitz
Sisterhood	Stacey Huse
Brotherhood	Bob Hirsh
B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator	Jennifer Stawasz

## TBT Caring Committee

Have you ever wondered how to notify the TBT Board of a life-cycle event? TBT is here to support you.

Contact Lori Kravchick at  
[caringcommittee@bethtorah.net](mailto:caringcommittee@bethtorah.net)

## Support TBT While Shopping on Amazon!

From now on, before you start shopping on Amazon, start with the link on the bottom of the Temple Beth Torah home page at [bethtorah.net](http://bethtorah.net). Amazon will contribute to TBT every time you make a purchase after using the link.

You can also order at AmazonSmile, <https://smile.amazon.com> and designate Temple Beth Torah Centreville.

## Directions to Building\*

4212-C Technology Court, Chantilly, VA 20151

From Route 66: Get off at Route 28 North. Go North to Route 50 West. Travel west on Route 50. Turn left on Pleasant Valley Rd. Turn left on Lafayette Center Dr. Turn left on Technology Court.

\*Our building is closed at present due to the COVID pandemic. All activities are virtual.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

Sunday, February 21	Purim Learning Box Pickup
	Food Drive
	Purim Treat Pickup
Friday, February 26	Adult Megillah Reading
Sunday, February 28	Religious School Purim

Watch the Blast for information on these events  
and more.

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## Thoughts From Rabbi Kenneth Block



In 1864, President Lincoln wrote, “Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.” And now, more than one hundred and fifty years later, in 2021, the United States of America is once again engaged in a civil war.

I am not a political pundit, however. I’m just a little ol’ country Rabbi. So my intent, dear reader, is not to address the civil war going on in the US. But instead the one going on in Judaism. “What civil war?” you ask.

The one that was started by Baruch de Spinoza, in truth Benedict de Spinoza, when he was excommunicated by the orthodox community. “The Lords of the ma'amad, having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Espinoza, have endeavored by various means and promises, to turn him from his evil ways. But having failed to make him mend his wicked ways, and, on the contrary, daily receiving more and more serious information about the abominable heresies which he practiced and taught and about his monstrous deeds, that the said Espinoza should be excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel. “By the decree of the angels, and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God, Blessed be He, and with the consent of all the Holy Congregation.” The official record of the excommunication issued on 27 July 1656, by the Talmud Torah congregation of Amsterdam.

The Torah, he argued, is not literally the word of God. Rather it is God inspired and man written! Therefore, the law is not binding as written, i.e. not to be followed literally.

Spinoza never converted and maintained throughout his life that he was a faithful Jew. He was accused of being a Pantheist, a Panentheist, and an atheist; the unholy trinity of orthodox Judaism. He was, in fact, a free thinker, presenting his views for consideration and not as the *only* way. His views were closely aligned with the teachings of the Buddha and the Vendanta tradition in India, which go back to the Eastern roots of Judaism.

Herein lies the basis of his excommunication. He challenged the Western influence on Judaism and sought a return to Biblical thinking. This is the root of the current civil war in Judaism today.

The Haredi and Masorti claim that medieval, ghetto Judaism is the only valid form of Judaism. We are traitors and heretics as Spinoza was and should be treated as he was treated. Since we cannot be excommunicated, they do what every cult does, build a wall around their followers and not let any outside information inside.

So, they create an emotionally, psychologically, and financially secure environment that prevents people from leaving. Since they are the only “true” form Judaism, they do not want their people to be exposed to any alternatives.

Let us not drink the Kool-Aid by making Orthodox Judaism the standard by which we judge our Judaism. Spinoza led a happy, successful, Jewish life outside the Orthodox community and so can we. Reform Judaism stands as a valid form of Judaism. Reform philosophy, teachings, and theology create a living Judaism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By joining and supporting Temple Beth Torah, you are strengthening our place in Jewish history. Please continue to “Love God with all your heart, with all your might, and your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Our presence is our resistance.

# A Musical Note from Cantor Lauren Laird



## The Song of Sea: A Song of Hope



On January 29 we celebrated Shabbat Shirah or the Shabbat of Song. The Torah portion for this particular Shabbat was Beshalach (Exodus 13:17-17:16) in which the Israelites reach the edge of the Sea, Moses lifts his staff, and our people cross into freedom. Usually, when we teach the story of crossing Sea, we say that with the Egyptians closing in, God parted the Sea and our forefathers and mothers walked across the newly dry seabed. What we leave out is how terrifying that moment must have been, whether you see it as the truth (literally walking between walls of water) or a metaphor (crossing into freedom). That is where Shirat HaYam or the Song of the Sea enters the picture.

The written text of Shirat HaYam itself is beautiful as Torah scribes separate the words into waves and columns imitating the parting waters and our people making their way to freedom. The actual words of the song include those that make up the Michamocha intermixed with the death of the Egyptians as the waves crashed back upon them. For example:

*I will sing to the Eternal, for He has triumphed gloriously;*

*Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.*

*The Eternal is my strength and might;*

*He is my deliverance.*

Why does the text mix praise and events? There are of course many Rabbinic explanations but the one that resonates most to me is the one that brings Miriam into the story. According to Talmudic scholars, when the Israelites reached the sea and the waters parted, the people did not immediately start walking. Rather, Miriam raised her timbral in her hand and the people followed her across the Sea – giving voice to the pieces of the text praising God. Understanding this, the Torah text is then literally showing us both the emotions of our people along with the events as they occurred – as if the text is illustrating the story for us.

Music has a unique power to make us feel better – the notes calm us, the words inspire us, and the voices bring us closer to one another. For TBT's Shabbat Shirah service this year, I sought to bring together different voices to remind us of our community – like the connection our people felt singing and walking across the sea together – as well as a couple pieces that we do not usually sing for services as I found myself embracing the opportunity to sing songs of comfort and hope. Like Miriam and the Israelites as they crossed the sea in Beshalach, I hope that hearing the inspiring music at our Shabbat Shirah service brought you comfort, happiness, and peace.

As the world pushes through the pandemic, may these next few months of celebration, including Purim, and Pesach, be ones of health, happiness, and love for you and your families.



# Religious School

TBT Religious School continues to build an amazing community of learning in our online environment. And we did not let a little thing like not being in person together stop us from having lots of holiday fun! In December, all students in our K-7 program received an awesome Chanukah learning box. The box included some standard Chanukah items like gelt and a dreidel, but we also challenged the students to get crafty. Our K-1 class made their own menorahs out of model magic, third grade made their own Chanukah slime, fourth grade made a Chanukah string art project, and grades five through seven got creative in the kitchen making chocolate Chanukah lollipops with their own candy molds. And for our Lego enthusiasts (young and old) we designed our own Lego menorah and dreidel kits for all students to build. Confession, some of us adults really geeked out on the Legos!



Gabe Probst displays his Lego menorah.



Getting the learning boxes for Chanukah ready for pick-up.

In the beginning of January, we made the switch from Google Meet to Zoom as our video conferencing platform. Zoom allows teachers more classroom management functions as well as some enhanced interaction tools. I cannot wait to highlight in the next newsletter some of the creative ways our teachers are embracing the technology learning environment.

Students in kindergarten through third grade celebrated Tu BiShvat at the end of January with a special hands-on craft. They received a clay pot to decorate along with potting soil and parsley seeds. The hope is that the parsley will grow just in time for our Passover celebration later this spring.

Speaking of spring, we are working on plans for Purim and Passover. Students in grades K-7 will receive another learning box to help in the celebrations. But more on that later!

## 2020-2021 PILLARS OF THE TEMPLE

We appreciate those members that support us by becoming Pillars of the Temple.  
Please consider becoming a Pillar.

### **Guardians of the Temple**

Robert and Heidi Hirsh

Stephen and Elizabeth Ward IV

### **Keepers of the Flame**

Jay and Melissa Margolis

### **Defenders of the Torah**

David and Josie Barondess

Ken and Susan Fried

John and Jennifer Harding

Jeff and Mary Horner

Jayne Ayers and Tye Jurgensen

Matt and Kathleen Kestenbaum

Howard and Gail Sulkin

# Social Action



Jeff Horner, Mary Horner and Jayne Ayers present a check from TBT to Dulles South Food Pantry.

Social action, social justice, Tikkun Olam, have been a part of the TBT fabric for many years. We teach it in our school through discussions on, and collection of, Tzedakah, through class community service or charity projects, and in our Judaics curriculum. In the past, our students/families have engaged in support of special needs homes, food drives, clothing and sports gear drives, raising funds for service dogs, and much more. Our adult members have likewise participated in raising funds, donating supplies, and donating their own time for several regional support organizations.

Recognizing the now-more-than-ever-need for such action in this challenging and distanced environment, this past summer the TBT Board added a Social Action Committee. Over the past several months, committee members have assisted with voter information, collected clothing for those in need, and donated to a regional social action group.

Prior to the November election, committee members Ken Fried, Jody Seidenstein, and Deb Mayer collaborated to provide TBT members (and others) an informational briefing on changes in Virginia election laws, helping to answer questions on absentee, early, and in-person voting.

A second project, related to our ongoing support for the *Dulles South Food Pantry*, committee member Joe Sutliff spearheaded a fall/winter clothing drive to benefit the *Dulles South Neighborhood Closet*. Gently used fall/winter clothing was donated by TBT member families (drive-by of course). Joe delivered two large boxes of fall/winter clothes and supported “the Closet” with distribution efforts.

This winter and spring, we are looking to add two new projects to our efforts. With our facility closed, our onsite food collections have been on hold. Likewise, not being in the building, our students have not participated in Tzedakah-related giving, discussions, and projects. We want to fix this. Committee members Jeff Horner and Jennifer Harding, working with our partner, the Dulles South Food Pantry, have determined that the cost for the Pantry to provide food for a family of four is \$25 per day. Toward that end, we will be working with our school to teach our students about the Dulles South Food Pantry, collect Tzedakah, and sponsor as many family-food-days as we can. We also will be collecting non-perishable canned and boxed food during our school pick-up for Purim/Passover project boxes. The topic also will be front and center at an upcoming TBT virtual happy hour (aka *the Tabernacle*).

The Committee will keep our membership abreast of regional programs hosted by other congregations, and national social justice organizations. Temple Rodef Shalom will be hosting a discussion on creating a Jewish response to the climate crisis – look for registration information in the next *Blast*. In particular, we will be helping to inform our congregation about the efforts of *Integrity First for America*, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, dedicated to holding alt-right, white supremacists, and neo-Nazi leaders accountable for their actions during August 2017 marches in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The TBT Social Action Committee is open to all members. Join us and add your ideas, problem solving solutions, passion, and energy (or favorite beverage or baked good...after all, doing good is about having fun!). For additional information - [howard.sulkin@bethtorah.net](mailto:howard.sulkin@bethtorah.net).

# CELEBRATING PURIM

**Purim begins on the evening of Thursday, February 25, 2021.**

**TBT Adult Megillah Reading is on Friday, February 26, 2021.**



With celebrations including costumes, skits and songs, noisemakers, and gifts of food, Purim is definitely full of fun! Purim is a joyous holiday that affirms and celebrates Jewish survival and continuity throughout history. The main communal celebration involves a public reading—usually in the synagogue—of the Book of Esther (M'gillah Esther), which tells the story of the holiday: Under the rule of King

Ahashverosh, Haman, the king's adviser, plots to exterminate all of the Jews of Persia. His plan is foiled by Queen Esther and her cousin Mordechai, who ultimately save the Jews of Persia from destruction. The reading of the m'gillah typically is a rowdy affair, punctuated by booing and noise-making when Haman's name is read aloud.

Purim is an unusual holiday in many respects. First, Esther is the only biblical book in which God is not mentioned. Second, Purim, like Chanukah, is viewed as a minor festival according to Jewish custom, but has been elevated to a major holiday as a result of the Jewish historical experience. Over the centuries, Haman has come to symbolize every anti-Semite in every land where Jews were oppressed. The significance of Purim lies not so much in how it began, but in what it has become: a thankful and joyous affirmation of Jewish survival.

Read more about Purim here: <https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/purim>.

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# OBSERVING PASSOVER

**Passover begins on Saturday, March 27th, 2021.**

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is a major Jewish spring festival celebrating freedom and family as we remember the Exodus from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. The main observances of this holiday center around a special home service called the seder, which includes a festive meal, the prohibition on eating chametz, and the eating of matzah.



On the 15th day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar, Jews gather with family and friends in the evening to read from a book called the Haggadah, meaning "telling," which contains the order of prayers, rituals, readings, and songs for the Passover seder.

The Haggadah helps us retell the events of the Exodus, so that each generation may learn and remember this story that is so central to Jewish life and history.

Passover is celebrated for either seven or eight days, depending on family and communal custom. In Israel and for most Reform Jews around the world, Passover is seven days, but for many other Jews, it is eight days.

Read more about Passover here: <https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/passover>.

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As we get closer to these holidays, read the Blast for information on Temple Beth Torah's celebrations!

## **Ongoing Virtual Activities at Temple Beth Torah**

**Links to all activities will be in the Blast, emailed weekly to members.**

**Shabbat Services**

**Holiday Services**

**B'nai Mitzvahs**

**Religious School**

**Lifelong Jewish Learning**

**Ladies Book Club**

**Torah Study**

**Social Action**

**TBT Tavern**

**Committee and Board Meetings**

**Special Events**

Temple Beth Torah

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