

April Bridge

Beth El Congregation

A Message from our Rabbi

"The Feast of Freedom"
Rabbi Jeff Kurtz-Lendner

The Passover Seder is one of the most dramatic and fulfilling of all Jewish rituals. And perhaps one of the most profound theological statements in terms of conceptualizing how Jewish rituals connect us with each other, to our ancestors and to God is when it says in the seder, "in every generation, each individual is required to see him/herself as if s/he him/herself actually departed Egypt personally."

Rituals bring us closer to God. By enacting certain motions that transcend the individual then the power of holiness affects our lives. The Torah is a piece of parchment with ink on it wrapped around some wood. But when we view the Torah as the holy physical embodiment of the word of God.

The story of Passover is about our ancestors' departure from Egyptian slavery to the freedom of nationhood. But let's be clear about what that freedom meant. As soon as Israel left Egypt we received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Freedom did not mean anarchy. Freedom did not mean a lack of obligation. Freedom meant that we became servants to God instead of servants to Pharaoh. Freedom meant accepting God's Torah on Mount Sinai as binding rather than accepting anarchy as a way of life.

When Jews see themselves as having personally experienced slavery and having also experienced God's salvation from oppression then we also understand what obligations our freedom requires of us.

The fundamental question people ask about their role in American society is "what are my rights?" In Judaism, however, the fundamental question we ask ourselves is "what are my obligations?" I recall years ago when I worked at Tulane Hillel, a student approached me for counseling after having been caught cheating on a take home examination. She told me she was going to be brought before a disciplinary board. As she spoke to me she downplayed the significance of her cheating and how that she and another student cheated together and that the other person was the primary perpetrator of the transgression.

I asked her how she felt about the offense. She said horrible. I asked her if she would do it again. She said absolutely not. We then discussed her attitude towards the disciplinary board. I told her that in a court of law a defendant should say as little as possible, admit no guilt, answer questions posed by the court but add nothing more.

But I told her to try a different approach when going before the disciplinary board. I suggested to her that she accept full responsibility, make no excuses, make no justifications or rationalizations and indicate that she is prepared to accept whatever consequences the board administers and tell the board that she is not asking for or expecting leniency or any special favors. Tell them, I advised her, that what she did was completely inexcusable, she regrets it and is prepared for whatever punishment is warranted. I told her that by approaching the board in this fashion she would reclaim her dignity and integrity and atone for her offense. I suggested that after she would receive whatever punishment she deserved she could then move forward towards making up academically whatever she had to do to remain in good academic standing.

Now, I know everyone wants to know the outcome. But the outcome of the story is not the point. The point is that the approach represents accepting full responsibility for one's actions. Frequently when problems occur and when people make mistakes someone in charge asserts, "I accept full responsibility for my actions." But what does that mean? Is that person prepared to accept consequences for

that “responsibility”? The student I advised determined that she had true remorse for her actions and decided to go ahead and take that approach to the board. She did not indicate any mitigating circumstances or ask for special favors. She told the board she was wrong and expected any punishments due to her. She reclaimed her integrity by taking responsibility for her actions and was prepared to accept any negative consequences the board would administer.

Such is the lesson of freedom at “Passover.” As Jews we live our lives “as if” each one of us “had actually experienced” slavery and exodus. We were in Egypt and we suffered, and we understand that life is precarious. We do not make demands of the world, but rather thank God every day for the life and freedom we have received and use that freedom to make the world better for others. We have the freedom to be good citizens, good Jews, good human beings. We have the freedom to be responsible. By living responsible lives, taking care of others, knowing what it was like to have been in Egypt and appreciating the graciousness of God in giving us freedom, we then do not take that freedom for granted. Rather, we understand that that freedom gives us the opportunity to live a life of obligation to our families, to our community, to our country and to our people.

Incidentally, the student received the minimum possible punishment the board was permitted to administer, one of the most lenient punishments they ever delivered.

A Message from our President

I hope everyone had a great month.

Our Temple via the Men’s Club and Sisterhood provided 4 dinners and 4 breakfasts at the Mosque as part of our commitment to open doors. Helping the less fortunate is always a Mitzvah in my eyes. I want to thank all those who participated. In Harrisonburg it works where you can have Muslims housing those less fortunate who rely on the Thermal Shelter to have a warm place to sleep and eat and

then have Jews going to the Mosque to feed those who are either probably Christian or non religious at all. It is a win-win situation

The Men’s Club Shabbat went very well, and we had 15 members participate in the service.

On Thursday April 6th we will have our 1st live Seder in 3 years. We’ve come a long way toward normalcy in the past year and I’m sure that trend will continue. I hope to see many of you at the Seder.

I hope everyone has a great month ahead.

April Yahrzeits

Fred Rudd - *Apr 1*
Ada Wise - *Apr 1, 1882*
Jacob Katzen - *Apr 2*
Joshua L. Robinson - *Apr 3, 2017*
Fanny Sissman - *Apr 4*
Lorraine Sonn - *Apr 5, 1972*
Mitchel Zindler - *Apr 5*
Joseph Hirsch - *Apr 6, 1964*
Joseph Ney - *Apr 6, 1916*
Eva Friddle - *Apr 7, 1967*
Allan Rose - *Apr 7*
Judith Levine Schweitzer - *Apr 7*
Joseph Fineberg - *Apr 9*
Ida Clayman - *Apr 9*
David Miller - *Apr 11, 1954*
Grover Cleveland Ney - *Apr 11*
Roslyn Freudenthal - *Apr 11, 1995*
Charles Loewner - *Apr 14, 1938*
Rosie Mayer - *Apr 16*
Martin Borodkin - *Apr 17*
Henia Schikman - *Apr 19*
Arthur Printz - *Apr 19*
Leah Perlman - *Apr 19, 2007*
Sam Schneider - *Apr 19*
Lloyd Flannery - *Apr 19, 2008*
Ralph Leon Rodbell - *Apr 20, 2011*
Hana Shaw - *Apr 21*

Philip Miller - *Apr 22, 1936*
Dorothy Funston - *Apr 23*
Herman Wise - *Apr 24, 1924*
Benjamin Kohen - *Apr 25, 1989*
Sara Slain - *Apr 26*
Harry Robinson - *Apr 26, 1905*
Candace F. Blatt - *Apr 26, 2009*
Herman Miller - *Apr 29, 1905*
Minnie Wise - *Apr 29, 1921*
Vera Nemoytin - *Apr 30, 1977*
Theodore Blatt - *Apr 30, 2001*

Recent Donations

Catherine Rogers – Yahrzeit – Ruth Rogers – Catherine's Mother

Ron Rubin – Yahrzeit - Bettye Rubin Neuwelt – Mother

Michael D. White – Yahrzeit



BETH EL CONGREGATION

APRIL 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						01
						Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
02	03	04	05	06	07	08
Religious School 9:30 am Torah Tots 10:30 am			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom Zoom Seder Rabbi-led 6:00 pm	Community Seder Temple 6:00 pm	Rabbi-led Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
09	10	11	12	13	14	15
NO Religious School			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom	Board Meeting 6:30 pm Zoom also	Rabbi-led Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Religious School 9:30 am	Italy's Jews: What you didn't know about the Holocaust Dr. Maura Hametz Webb Yom HaShoah Program Sanctuary 7:00 pm	Sisterhood Meeting Temple 6:00 pm	Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Rabbi-led Shabbat Services Torah reading 7:30 pm Sponsored Oneg Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Religious School 9:30 am			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Rabbi-led Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Livestream also	
30						
Religious School 9:30 am						