

# May Bridge

*Beth El Congregation*

## A Message from our Rabbi

*Empathy*

*Rabbi Jeffrey Kurtz-Lendner*

Often in order for someone to understand us we first have to understand them.

Empathy is not an easy trait. Most of the time we're so wrapped up in our own needs and desires that we're completely clueless about what someone else wants, needs, feels. Sometimes we want to be helpful. But again, when we want to be helpful, sometimes we want to be helpful in the way WE want to be helpful; and not the way the person receiving the help would like to be helped. When we're truly empathetic then we don't think about how WE want to help them but how THEY want to be helped.

I've discussed this before, but one thing that I think is helpful for us as Jews is to understand our Christian neighbors'

inability to understand us. I'm not talking about hostile Christians. I'm talking about friendly Christians. Sometimes we don't want our non-Jewish neighbors to think about our Jewishness. Sometimes we just want them to think of us as neighbors, as friends, as human beings. Of course we never want to be HATED for being Jewish. But sometimes we don't want to be LOVED for being Jewish either. We just want our neighbors and friends to think of us as we think of ourselves – Americans who happen to be Jewish.

That concept of Christians not understanding us really hit me during a particular conversation I had one time. I was speaking to a Christian group once when that gulf finally dawned on me. "Why don't you accept Jesus?" I always hear.

I suddenly realized it's because that Christians, even benevolent, loving, friendly Christians, just can't put themselves into the heads of Jews. Even Christians who love Jews believe in the core of their being that we Jews know that Jesus is God but reject him. Assuming Jews rejected Jesus assumes that we, as Jews, give Jesus that much attention. Christians believe that Jews reject Jesus in some kind of active way. They just can't understand that we don't

reject Jesus, he's irrelevant. He doesn't matter. We don't even think about him.

When I see a Christian being truly empathetic and thinking about it all of a sudden a light goes on, and they realize the prejudice of their own perspective towards Jews. All of a sudden they realize, "oh, Jesus isn't important to you at all." I saw that happen one time when a Christian who really loved Judaism once began research for a paper.

She began, "what do Jewish texts at the time of Jesus say about him?"

"Nothing." I said.

"What do you mean, nothing?" she asked.

"There is absolutely no reference at all to Jesus in any Jewish text contemporary to the time at which he supposedly lived."

"How can that be?" she asked.

And a light went on for her. For her, she respected Jews for having rejected Jesus and wanted to understand it. For her, the active rejection of Jesus is part of the Jewish religion.

But it's not.

And suddenly her world was turned upside in that short conversation.

Suddenly she realized that the active rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religion is a Christian fiction and projection. The idea that Jesus would have been absolutely irrelevant to the Jewish community in which he lived never crossed her mind because that's not part of her Christian story.

Look, I'm not criticizing Christians for being who they are. I'm certainly happier when they love us than when they hate us. But I thought that not only do they not conceptualize where we're coming from – but we don't understand why they ask us these questions because not only do they not understand us but we don't understand them!

So I thought I'd share these reflections with you, because to help bridge those differences we need to UNDERSTAND the differences. When we understand how they perceive us then we can do our part to bridge those gaps. Christians think about Judaism in terms of how Jews are part of the Christian story. Often we don't realize why they don't see us for who they are, but they need to objectify us – sometimes negatively, but sometimes positively.

Perhaps we can learn from that, in our conversations with our Christian neighbors, we can communicate our

views in a way that they can understand them.

Once during an adult education class a Christian asked me, “tell me why Jews reject Jesus.” I said, “who?” She thought I simply didn’t hear the question, so she repeated, “Jesus,” and I said, “who’s that?” And I made my point by my humorous response, and then explained it, explained that I answered in a playful way so to drive home the point that the question comes from a Christian pre-supposition and I wanted to answer the question from a Jewish perspective.

When we can understand the differences in perspectives, we can therefore help ourselves and our neighbors to understand each other better. We can help each other see each other, not as friends with different religions, not as friends with different beliefs, or as friends with different philosophies.

But simply, as friends.

## **A Message from our President**

I hope everyone had a good month.

April, like life in general, had some highs and lows.

We had 2 very successful events to represent the highs.

First, we had our first live Seder in 3 years. We had about 50 people enjoy the celebration and our communal dinner together. The service was led by Rabbi K-L with a lot of help from the congregation. Thank you sisterhood for sponsoring the Seder and for all you do during the year.

Second, we had a very successful program for Yom HaShoah. First, we lit 6 yahrzeit candles to represent the 6 million plus Jews murdered during the Holocaust. I thought it was quite moving. Then, we had a presentation by JMU Professor Maura Hametz on the experiences of the Italian Jews during the war. This was followed by a robust question and answer period. The program was very interesting and educational, and I believed all who attended (approximately 50 people) felt like the program was very worthwhile.

Unfortunately, we had to say goodbye to Nancy Branner Stewart who passed away last Sunday. She was the wife of long-time member John Stewart who passed away in 2010. Her ashes will be laid to rest next to John on Monday May 1st at 3:30 PM at our Beth El Cemetery. May her memory be a blessing

I believe May will be another exciting month for us. The month begins with our own Sisterhood leading us in worship this coming Friday night the 5th of May. I'm sure the service and the Oneg to follow will be well done. Please come and support the Sisterhood. The month will end with our annual Congregational meeting on WEDNESDAY May 31st to elect your board for the upcoming year. This year we will be having wine, cheese, and desserts. The time is 6:30 to 8:30 so please come and enjoy some good eats and wine along with your fellow congregants. We want to make this an enjoyable event for one and all.

I hope everyone has a great month.

## May Yahrzeits

Grace Gorlitz - *May 2, 2020*  
Max M Joseph - *May 3, 1924*  
Bruno Hirsch - *May 4, 1888*  
Ella P Blatt - *May 5, 1979*  
Rose Gelman - *May 6*  
Julia S Ney - *May 7, 1944*  
Maurice Scheuer - *May 7, 1935*  
Theresa Hirsch - *May 8, 1903*  
Samuel Gandler - *May 8, 1967*  
Gerald Ornstein - *May 8, 2020*  
Henry Myerberg - *May 9*  
Lillian Tassle - *May 9*

Greg H. Kahn - *May 9, 2013*  
Bob Nemoytin - *May 10, 1984*  
Joyce Helbraun - *May 10, 2018*  
Janet Kohen - *May 11, 2008*  
Lillian Coxe - *May 12*  
Paula Kaiser - *May 13, 1997*  
Edna Ash - *May 14, 1979*  
Violet Handley - *May 14*  
Irving Meyer Penn - *May 14, 1997*  
Sophie Blatt - *May 16, 1969*  
Lynn Miller - *May 16, 2001*  
Louis Scheuer - *May 16, 1927*  
Sylvia Minskoff - *May 16, 2006*  
Minnie Wender - *May 19, 1962*  
David Frankel - *May 20, 1988*  
Arnold Abriss - *May 21, 1984*  
Rabbi Sheldon ben Zvi Fleming - *May 23*  
Heinz Wallach - *May 26, 1937*  
Mildred Greenfield - *May 26*  
Barbara (Bobbie) Bloom - *May 27, 2018*  
Charles A Hammer - *May 27, 1938*  
Abe M Loewner - *May 27, 1932*  
Ludwig Hirsch - *May 28, 1929*  
David Kohen - *May 28*  
Richard Kohn - *May 28*  
Robert Minskoff - *May 29, 2016*  
Jay Nusbaum - *May 30*  
Molly Huffman - *May 30*  
Erwin Helbraun - *May 31, 2010*

## Recent Donations

Bo & Sandi Rose – Yahrzeit – Allan Rose  
Eric & Jayne Rynar – Yahrzeit – Sam  
Schneider  
Charles and Gail Clemons – Yahrzeit –  
Shirley Dobin  
William & Leslie Ney – Yahrzeit –  
Joseph Ney  
Kenneth Siever – Donation – General  
Fund  
Frances Flannery – Yahrzeit – Lloyd  
Flannery – (Father)  
Edward Ney & Margee Greenfield-Ney –

Yahrzeit – Mildred Greenfield  
Michael Schikman – Yahrzeit – Henia  
Schikman  
Deanna Cebulash – Yahrzeit Irving  
Meyer Penn (Father) Hebrew name  
(Avram Mayer)

## Community Spotlight

This month's spotlight: Leeanne  
Shepherd.

*If you would like to have an entry featured  
in the spotlight for the Bridge please contact  
the editor. \*For Temple members only\**



Second Home Learning Center  
is proud to present...

**Annie Jr.**

MAY 18 @ 7:30PM  
MAY 19 @ 7:30PM  
MAY 20 @ 7:30PM  
MAY 21 @ 4:30PM

Outdoor Performance  
Back Home on the Farm  
2915 Willow Run Rd, Harrisonburg, VA  
22802

WATCH FOR DETAILS ON  
FACEBOOK @SECONDHOMEVA  
OR SECONDHOMEVA.COM

BACK HOME  
ON THE FARM

SPONSORED IN PART BY  
arts council  
of the valley

ADMISSION BY DONATION  
SUGGESTED \$10

Music by Charles Strouse  
Lyrics by Martin Charnin  
Book by Thomas Meehan  
Annie Jr. is presented through special arrangement with  
Music Theatre International, New York, NY  
(212) 541-4644 mtishows.com

# BETH EL CONGREGATION

## MAY 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	01	02	03	04	05	06
			No Ethics Class		Sisterhood Shabbat Torah reading 7:30 pm Sponsored Oneg Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
07	08	09	10	11	12	13
Religious School 9:30 am  Torah Tots 9:30 am			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Rabbi-led Shabbat Services 7:30 pm Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Mother's Day NO Religious School			Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom	Board Meeting 6:30 pm Zoom also	Rabbi-led Shabbat Services Torah reading 7:30 pm Sponsored Oneg Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Last Day of Religious School End of Year Program 9:30 am	Sisterhood Dinner Get-Together Vito's Port Republic Rd 6:00 pm		Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom		Rabbi-led Shabbat Services, Visiting Cantor Evan Weiner 7:30 pm Sponsored Oneg Livestream also	Torah Study 10:30 am Zoom
28	29	30	31			
	Memorial Day		Ethics Class 12:00 pm Zoom  Annual Congregational Meeting / Board Election 6:30-8:30 pm Wine, cheese & more			

## ***A note from the editor***

After talking with some friends from the area, I have decided to set up a Facebook group for “Jewish Young Adults of the Shenandoah Valley” in an effort to connect young Jewish adults in our local areas, some of which have no local synagogue to attend. We plan to organize periodic events such as happy hours, hiking, and Shabbat dinners. The group is open to any Jewish young adult who lives in Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro, Lexington, and the surrounding (and in-between) areas. If you are interested in joining, or know someone who might be, [here is a link to the group](#). For those reading on a paper instead of electronically, the group can be found by searching “Jewish Young Adults of the Shenandoah Valley” on Facebook. If you do not have Facebook but would still like to be kept in the loop, email me and I will add you to the list. *benyameen.nissley@gmail.com* Thank you!