



Nov-Dec 2016  
Tishrei/Cheshvan/Kislev - 5777

Morgantown, West Virginia

It is a Tree of Life to  
those that hold fast to it.

#### **RABBI**

Joseph Hample

#### **OFFICERS**

President	Ed Gerson
Immediate Past Pres.	Adam Rosefsky
1st VP	TBD
2nd VP	Robert Klein
Treasurer	Linda Herbst
Secretary	Laura Cohen

#### **BOARD**

Alison Bass	Laura Cohen
Ed Gerson	Linda Herbst
Yoav Kaddar	Bob Klein
Rusty Mall	Barry Pallay
Jaimie Russell	Merle Stolzenberg
Robyn Temple-Smolkin	

#### **COMMITTEES**

House	Marty Sippin
Education	Jaimie Russell
Social Action	Susan Brown
Israel Committee	Art Jacknowitz
CARE	Merle Stolzenberg
Ritual Committee	Rich Cohen
Newsletter	Sylvia Cooper
Webmaster	Jan Ditzian
Kitchen	TBD

#### **ASSOCIATES**

Sisterhood	Rosa Becker
Hillel	Rich Gutmann
Hadassah	Merle Stolzenberg
WV Holocaust Ed. Center	Edith Levy

#### **INSIDE HIGHLIGHTS**

Pages 2 - 5	From Rabbi Joe
Page 6	Rabbi Joe Adult Ed
	Margalit Children's Ed
Page 7	Teen Opportunities
	An Essay from Lee
	Celebrating Sukkot
Page 8	Poetry Quarter
	Israel Dancing for Sukkot
Page 9	President's Message
	Yizkor Book Todah
	Simchat Torah
Page 10	Community Sharing
	Hadassah
page 11	Calendar
Page 12	Women of Faith Luncheon

## **First the Latke Brigade,**

Notice: all men are invited to join the work and merriment as the world famous Tree of Life Latke Brigade (TOLLB) convenes for the annual Chanukah Party.

We meet at **2:30 pm on Sunday, December 18th.**

If you have good cast iron skillets, spatulas, favorite potato peelers, and work aprons bring them. We also welcome well told jokes and easy to sing songs. Wear clothing which you don't care about, because they will smell like cooking oil for weeks following this great event. Eat a soothing lunch to prepare your system for all the booze and the latkes which we sample.

The TOLLB provides the potatoes and aged and very mellow Slivovitz, plum brandy, for your enjoyment. No experience is required. The TOLLB has a famous training program which includes our exacting quality control standards.

Women will not be allowed to work in the kitchen but will be allowed to poke a nose in the kitchen to sample fresh latkes and maybe get a shot of Slivovitz.

Children, whether boys or girls, are permitted to accompany male adults in the kitchen to learn the fine art of Latke making.

Remember our motto:

**No Latke Til Its Time.**

Respectfully submitted  
General Rich Cohen,

Commanding Officer, TOL Latke Brigade "



## **then the Party!**

### **2016 Latke Party**

**Save the Date**  
**Sunday, December 18th**  
**5:00 - 8:00 pm**

#### **Please bring**

your family and friends,  
Menorah (Chanukkiah) and candles,  
and a vegetarian side dish to share.  
(We provide the latkes!)

Please check *page ten* for important additional information.  
Also, look for more information in the weekly TOL email.





**Rabbi  
Hample**

### Four-letter Toys

There is hardly a better-known Jewish object than the dreidel, the top that we spin at Chanukkah, with Hebrew letters on the four sides. Together with *gelt*, coins (or candy coins) given as a Chanukkah present, the dreidel recalls the gambling games supposedly played by persecuted Jews in the Chanukkah story, as a pretext for meetings whose real purpose was religious or military.

Jews *were* oppressed in the relevant era – the 160s BCE, under Seleucid (Greek-Syrian) rule – but there is no evidence of gambling as a decoy activity. The dreidel, like many other beloved Jewish artifacts, was probably borrowed from non-Jews at some point in our journey and Judaized by the folk tradition. When I was a prison chaplain in California, few of my congregants were actually Jews. But at Chanukkah I showed dreidels to everyone, and a Mexican-American inmate said a similar toy is used in his culture. It's called a *toma todo*, "take all."

I imagine the first dreidels were carved from wood, still a common material. In the famous song, the dreidel is made "out of clay," but perhaps only to rhyme with "play": in the Yiddish version the trinket is fashioned *fun blai*, "of lead." The item may also be produced from silver or bronze, pewter or aluminum, glass or plastic, beads or paper, even semiprecious stones. There are designer dreidels, electric dreidels, musical dreidels, Lego dreidels. There are wearable dreidels, edible dreidels, inflatable dreidels, hollow dreidels that may be filled with candy. It just doesn't seem like Chanukkah without dreidels.

How did the dreidel become indispensable? I'm guessing it's because Chanukkah was a fairly minor holiday in the old country, but has been inflated in America to compete with the splashy December festival of the host

culture. As a counterpart of the ubiquitous holiday tree, Chanukkah offers either the menorah (candelabra) or the dreidel. Many years ago, one visionary even proposed a dreidel big enough to put presents under, but it never caught on.

The letters on the dreidel are the Hebrew equivalents of *N, G, H,* and *S*. These are initials of game instructions, in Yiddish, specifying that the player wins or loses money. But they have come to be understood as an acronym for the Hebrew *nes gadol hayah sham*, "a great miracle happened there," a phrase occurring in no ancient text. Possibly the spread of the dreidel to non-Yiddish-speaking Jews encouraged the reinterpretation. Still, it is correct to call Chanukkah a miracle holiday. The menorah blessings and the separate *Al ha-Nissim* prayer thank God for a wondrous deliverance.

I confess that I have never found dreidel to be a particularly exciting game: it's too simple. When I teach it to children, I change the rules to make the activity more creative. In my version, if the dreidel falls on *N*, the kid has to identify a Nature miracle; *G*, a Gradual miracle; *H*, a Home miracle; *S*, a School miracle. This makes the miracle concept more personal, enabling students to treat any breakthrough event as a favor from God.

Our congregational Chanukkah party on Sunday, December 18, will include menorah lighting, *latkes* (potato pancakes) provided by our world-famous *Latke* Brigade, and family-friendly entertainment. But you know you're looking for dreidels too, and we'll have plenty of them, I promise. Better yet, bring your own, especially if you have some unusual specimens: it'll enhance everyone's celebration. Nice Getting Happy Smiles.

### Judaism Amid Diversity

*I addressed an interfaith event at Morgantown's First Presbyterian Church on October 23. Here's what I said.*

#### Coexistence in Theory

Today is a Jewish holiday, Hoshana Rabbah. It is the seventh day of Sukkot, the autumn harvest festival.

In the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, seventy bulls were sacrificed at Sukkot (Numbers 29:12-34). According to the Talmud (Sukkah 55b), these seventy bulls were offered on behalf of the seventy nations of the world. So this is a holiday with a diversity theme, an ecumenical nuance. 'Tis the season to be motley.

Many religions are accustomed to a position of dominance in their societies. They have a difficult adjustment finding their place in a secular or pluralistic civilization. For Jews, minority status is the norm: we're used to it. Judaism isn't a missionary religion, out to convert the planet. Our God is the God of the whole earth, but our God doesn't expect all of humanity to keep kosher or honor the sabbath: those rules are for *Jews*. Non-Jews are only called to follow the laws given to Adam and Eve, or Noah, or other non-Hebrews in the Torah.

So we Jews are content with diversity, up to a point. But what happens when the tide of diversity begins to erode the pillars of faith? American popular culture, much of it constructed by Jewish authors and artists and entrepreneurs, is constantly pulling people away from ancient texts and traditions. And I love American popular culture, but I love Judaism too. It's my job to reconcile them, but that doesn't come so naturally to my congregation.

There are lots of Jews in this town who don't affiliate with the synagogue, who give the sanctuary a wide berth. Even for the devout, accommodation to the host culture is a continuing necessity. We have to translate the prayers, or at least transliterate them, print the Hebrew in English letters. We have to serve pizza at holiday celebrations: our old-country cuisine doesn't appeal to the kids. We have to reschedule worship around the football game or the high school prom: otherwise we'd lose the whole flock.

Since I don't necessarily fill the pews in my synagogue, I do more interfaith gigs every year. I'm currently teaching a Thursday afternoon program at OLLI, the lifelong learning center at Mountaineer Mall. My course is called "Old Testament Rituals: Don't Try These at Home!" As it happens, my students are mainly non-Jews. They're more curious about Judaism than Jews

are. I had a seminary classmate who was English, and who said Americans find her very witty, just because of her accent: her British compatriots don't consider her particularly droll. That's the advantage of a rabbi in a non-Jewish setting: they think I'm exotic. Jews have seen rabbis before: but for non-Jews, the novelty hasn't worn off yet.

I worry that Judaism is in trouble, religion is in trouble. Especially progressive denominations like mine: I'm a Reform rabbi; staunchly traditional denominations serve a more receptive constituency. But the kind of people who used to attend Reform synagogues, or liberal churches, may no longer join *any* congregation. They can look elsewhere for community, for humanitarian initiatives, for the encounter with infinity.

So what's the problem? For one thing, organized religion seems so tribal. You meet someone interesting at work or school or a party, and you can't hang out with them because they're a different religion? How random is that? Even more for Jews: Jews are so few that we are very alert to the perils of parochialism; but other urban sophisticates notice it too.

For another thing, Judaism is such a complicated religion, all those picky little do's and don'ts. Some years ago I was a student rabbi in Spokane, Wash. One morning, a couple of my Spokane congregants took me to breakfast and shared their discomfort with Judaism. They were seekers, they said: they'd explored many faith traditions; and they found Judaism the *least* satisfying of all. They complained Judaism is always presented in a flood of words and facts, Hebrew and history. It's too intellectual, they said: where's the transcendent part?

That was hard for me to hear, because I savor the wonkery of Judaism, the centrality of the documents. I often feel Jews don't know what Judaism has to offer. My congregants will go to a non-Jewish wedding or funeral and they'll rave about something beautiful the minister quoted. If only we had the equivalent in our liturgy! Well, what was it, I'll ask? Oh, it was "Love your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:18) or "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalms 23:1) or "Man does not live by bread alone" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Of course,

those are Jewish precepts, straight out of the Hebrew scripture. How did we ever forget that?

But that's my failure, our failure, us rabbis. We still haven't figured out how to sell Judaism to Jews. And to some extent, all clergy, all faith leaders suffer with this. Religion is everywhere, and yet it's dimly understood, poorly appreciated. It's so easy to trivialize it, or misuse it to divide people. Religion isn't meant to be a weapon. It's meant to impart a little dignity to life's stressful transitions, strengthen you in your trials and tribulations, help you walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalms 23:4). I like my own tradition, because it reminds me of my parents and grandparents, not that they were synagogue goers. But everyone's tradition is equally legitimate. Religions are like languages. They all say the same thing in different ways. But the one you were exposed to in childhood, or at some pivotal point in your journey, is probably going to resonate more than Brand X.

So we Jews know ours isn't the only path. Even in heavily Jewish New York or L.A., every Jew has non-Jewish confidants, colleagues, relatives. All the more in West Virginia, where Jews are a mere sliver of the population. Our non-Jewish friends and sympathizers are actually a great resource to Judaism. Tree of Life Congregation could barely function without the time and effort of our non-Jewish spouses and supporters. Some of my best Jews aren't technically Jews at all.

The great thing about Judaism is that it validates dissent. The *m'zuzah*, the prayer box on a Jewish doorpost, is typically mounted on the diagonal. Why? In the Middle Ages, one rabbi insisted it should be vertical; another rabbi maintained it should be horizontal. We split the difference. Judaism isn't a religion of my way or the highway: it's a religion of debate and discussion and compromise. When the sages disagree, the formula of reconciliation is, *Ellu v'ellu divrei Elohim chayyim*, both these and those are the words of the living God (Talmud Eruvin 13b).

To revive Judaism, we've got to re-engage those texts. In Sunday school, I teach Bible stories and rabbinic legends with skits and games, art projects and song parodies. Boredom never

made anyone a better Jew. We need to open up Judaism to a new generation and a new sensibility. You can't keep doing what sizzled fifty years ago. That was then, this is now.

We need to reclaim Jewish spirituality, Jewish God-talk. Yes, even Reform Judaism. Granted, many of my congregants are agnostics or freethinkers. But that's standard for our people: *Israel* means "God-wrestler," the name given to Jacob after he tussled with the angel (Genesis 32:25-29). Jews are people who struggle with God.

To be a Jew is to be a question asker. You know, the Talmud is all questions, rabbis challenging each other's certainties. People consult holy books for answers, but the Talmud just prompts more questions: you go to the Talmud with one question and come away with a dozen questions. That's the core of our religion. As long as our people keep asking questions, Judaism is here to stay.

### Coexistence in Practice

I've been the rabbi at Tree of Life Congregation, around the corner on South High Street, since 2012. It's a very satisfying pulpit, a wonderful mix of people. But I came here from a very different position on the West Coast, a correctional chaplaincy in a remote area on the California-Oregon border. For two years I was the first-ever Jewish chaplain at Pelican Bay State Prison, maximum security. 3200 inmates, each with his own spiritual needs. Religion is the only hobby allowed in prison, so naturally they make the most of it.

At Pelican Bay I had to serve diverse faith groups. I had a Protestant colleague and a Catholic colleague; there were volunteers from Buddhism, from the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses. But there was no imam while I was at the prison, so I organized Ramadan, and explained it to the sergeant too. Nor was there a Native American spiritual leader. Native American spiritual leaders are hard to recruit, since there isn't a seminary that trains them. But the Native American religion was very popular, with the sweat lodge and the peace pipe: because tobacco was otherwise forbidden, but they had to let Native Americans use it for religious purposes. I coordinated that too.

At Pelican Bay I enjoyed dia-



logue with all the different religious believers passing through my office. I was fascinated to find parallels between my tradition and others. For example, every religion has a doxology, a generic praise of God that serves as a liturgical filler. In Judaism, I knew, it's the Kaddish. In Protestantism, it's the prayer that begins, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." In Catholicism, it's the Gloria Patri: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." In Islam it's called Al-Fatihah: "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful..." It's like the logon and password to the world of prayer.

Another of my roles at Pelican Bay was to administer the religious diet program. The prison provided kosher, halal, or vegetarian meals to those who filled out the form, subject to my authorization. I approved only my most fervent congregants for the kosher menu, which was by far the most expensive. I discovered halal isn't all that different from kosher: no pork, no predators or scavengers, no blood, and a similar slaughtering method. So I steered all but my best students to the halal menu.

My prison chaplaincy was educational beyond anything I learned in seminary. And it empowered me to seize interfaith opportunities here in Morgantown. I often address schools and churches, professional conferences and humanitarian groups. I appeared at the Rotary Club in Fairmont last month, and I'm visiting the Cultural Issues class at WVU next week. Diversity shouldn't threaten us, it should intrigue us. The more, the merrier.

## The Point of Judaism

*I addressed the Rotary Club of South Fairmont on September 28. Here's what I said.*

Know what this is? It's a *shofar*, a ram's horn. There's a lot in the Bible about ram's horns. The walls of Jericho are blown down with ram's horns (Joshua 6:1-20). A blast of the horn welcomes Moses to Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 19) and David to Jerusalem (II Samuel 6:15, I Chronicles 15:27-28). A horn was blown in the

jubilee year to free slaves (Leviticus 25:9-10), and a horn will be blown at the final redemption to call the Israelites home from exile (Isaiah 27:13). Horns were blown routinely in worship settings (Psalms 98:6, 150:3), especially on holidays (Psalms 81:4).

For modern Jews, the ram's horn is linked to one particular holiday at the beginning of the seventh month. The seventh month is holy just as the seventh day is holy. The Bible counts the months from the spring, so the beginning of the seventh month is the new moon nearest the autumn equinox, somewhere between early September and early October. This year it's pretty late: October 3, next Monday. The *shofar* will be sounded next Monday at Tree of Life Congregation in Morgantown, and in synagogues all over the world.

In the scripture, this holiday is called Yom T'r'u'ah, "the day of horn blowing" (Numbers 29:1). The text doesn't say much about what the holiday means, except that it's a day of remembrance (Leviticus 23:24). But in Bible times, one occasion for sounding the horn is the coronation of kings (II Samuel 15:10, II Kings 9:13). Tradition connects our horn blowing holiday to the re-crowning of God as our ruler, swearing God in for a fresh term as sovereign of the universe. For rabbinic Judaism, this is considered the new year, even though it's in the seventh month. Sorry that's so confusing. The expression Rosh ha-Shanah, "new year," occurs in the Bible only in the book of Ezekiel (40:1), but it is now the standard name of the horn blowing holiday.

As it happens, there's another holiday nine days later on the Biblical schedule: Yom Kippur, "the day of atonement," a fast for purification (Leviticus 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7), October 12 this year. For the rabbis these two holidays, Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, define a short season of repentance, a brief chance to get right with God. In a little-known Bible story, a rancher called Nabal dies ten days after he sins (I Samuel 25:10-11, 38). As the Talmud (Rosh ha-Shanah 18a) frames it, this proves transgressors have ten days to repent. I guess Nabal didn't repent.

We Jews don't focus much the

rest of the year on crime and punishment, judgment and salvation. We pack all that stress into this sprint for forgiveness at the brink of autumn: the Days of Awe or High Holidays. So this is the busiest stretch on the calendar for rabbis. I'm tearing my hair out, what little hair I've got left.

Judaism is based on the Bible: the Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the Old Testament. But Judaism has had to grow beyond the Hebrew Bible, just as Christianity has, and for the same reason: the Temple was destroyed. The Hebrew Bible defines a religion that revolves around a national Temple, a hereditary priesthood, and agricultural sacrifices: but the Temple was leveled, the priesthood was disbanded, and the sacrifices were abolished. Oh no! What do we do now? There could be some different solutions to that riddle. The church fathers met in one conference room and wrote the gospel, the "New Testament." The rabbis met in another conference room and wrote the Talmud, the "Oral Torah." So the Hebrew Bible is one book with two competing sequels.

For the church fathers, the question of "What do we do now?" is answered by Christ on the cross. Jesus takes the place of the Temple and the Hebrew priesthood. For the church, the crucifixion is the ultimate sacrifice foreshadowed by the Levitical sacrifices, permanently securing everyone's atonement from now on. The destruction of the Temple was all part of God's plan.

The rabbis propose a different answer. The priestly protocols and the agricultural sacrifices may have to be put on hold, until the Temple is rebuilt. But we can still keep the sacred times, we can still eat the sacred foods, we can still peruse the sacred texts. On sabbath and festival I can bless the lamps, the wine, the uniqueness of the moment. My dinner table becomes the altar when I speak holy words over it (Pirkei Avot 3:4). My home becomes the Temple when I write scripture on my doorpost (Deuteronomy 6:9, 11:20): that's called a *m'zuzah*. My body becomes God's instrument when I attach scripture to my arm and head for weekday morning worship: that's called *t'fillin*. My clothing becomes God's regalia when I display fringes on the four corners of my

garment (Numbers 15:38-39, Deuteronomy 22:12): that's called a *tallit*. Any commandment we can't fulfill in the three-dimensional world, we can honor by reading it and thinking about it and talking about it. As the rabbis explain, *Talmud Torah k'neved kullam*, studying Torah is the equivalent of all the commandments (Talmud Shabbat 127a).

In rabbinic Judaism, prayer takes the place of sacrifice. As the prophet Hosea (14:3) says, we offer You the bulls of our lips: sacrifice can be purely verbal. Jews are taught to pray three times a day, following the example of the three founding generations of the Hebrew nation. Abraham and Sarah prayed in the morning; Isaac and Rebekah prayed in the afternoon; Jacob, Rachel, and Leah prayed in the evening. The Talmud (B'rachot 26b) deploys Biblical verses to prove it.

The original prayerbook was the book of Psalms, and we still use Psalms in worship all the time. Other prayers drawn from the Biblical text are the Sh'ma (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, etc.), the affirmation of God's oneness, which Jews repeat evening and morning; Mah Tov (Numbers 24:5, etc.), the hymn of Balaam, which Jews recite upon entering the synagogue; and the priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-26), which Christians call the benediction: "May the Eternal bless you and keep you," etc. The V'shamru (Exodus 31:16-17), about the sabbath as the symbol of the covenant, looms large in our weekly sabbath observance. Still, the greater part of Jewish liturgy is post-Biblical: inspired by the scripture, but formulated by the rabbis. Jews tend to say fixed prayers in a fixed order, more like Catholics than Protestants. On the other hand, Jews tend to reject visual aids in worship, more like Protestants than Catholics.

The Bible Jews read is what Christians call the Old Testament, but more precisely what *Protestants* call the Old Testament. The *Catholic* Old Testament includes the apocrypha, Hebrew books deemed unreliable by the rabbis for one reason or another. In the narrow sense, the Torah means specifically the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. That's the holiest part, in Jewish doctrine: that's what's hand-written on the parchment scrolls stored in the sacred ark in the synagogue; that's what we chant aloud from in the most elaborate

synagogue services.

Supposedly the Pentateuch contains all of God's commandments. You know the big ten, from the stone tablets: Don't kill, don't steal, don't bear false witness, etc.; but of course there are commandments scattered throughout the document. Jewish legend claims there's a total of 613 commandments, although everyone doesn't agree on exactly what they are. The Jewish view is that most of the commandments are only for Israel: God couldn't care less if non-Jews eat pork, or work on the sabbath; those rules are for Jews. Non-Jews are only responsible for the laws given to Adam and Eve, or Noah, or other non-Hebrews in the text.

Jews don't aspire to convert all of humanity, Jews don't proselytize. Judaism isn't a world religion: it never was; it's a national religion, meant for one people only. We don't believe God wants everyone to be Jews. God wants *Jews* to be Jews, the best Jews we can possibly be: and God wants non-Jews to be the best non-Jews you can possibly be. Virtuous gentiles in the Bible, like Jethro, Cyrus, and Job, model the behavior God expects of the other nations. Maimonides, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish rabbi, says the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come (Hilchot T'shuvah 3:5). In other words, you don't have to be Jewish to be "saved." That's not our terminology, but you know what I mean.

I am often asked if there's an afterlife in Judaism. The official theory is yes, but the details are tricky. In Christianity, your messiah has already come. When you die, you go straight to heaven to be with Jesus. In Judaism, inconveniently, our messiah hasn't arrived yet. This creates a problem. When we die, do we go to heaven right away, or not till the messiah comes? If we can go to heaven without the messiah, what's the need of a messiah? On the other hand, if we can't go to heaven until the messiah comes, where's grandma now? Because there's no satisfactory answer to this question, Jews prefer not to be too specific about the next world. We'll find out when we get there.

Meanwhile, it is in *this* life that we have the privilege of keeping

God's commandments. Judaism is more this-world-oriented than Christianity. Judaism is more physical than Christianity, a point made disparagingly in the New Testament: "Behold Israel *in the flesh*," says Paul in reference to the Jews (I Corinthians 10:18), and he doesn't mean it as a compliment. Judaism has a lot of body rituals: the dietary laws, circumcision, menstrual purity; Christianity set all of that aside. Jewish identity is hereditary: we are born Jewish. We're the biological descendants of ancient Israel: Christians are content to be the spiritual descendants of ancient Israel, as they see it. In one way, Christianity is fleshly: you have a God who became human; there's nothing quite like that in Judaism. But as St. Athanasius spins it, God became like us in order that we might become like God. No Jew is that ambitious.

Anyone know what's the most important Jewish holiday? What's the only holiday mentioned in the ten commandments? The sabbath: sunset Friday to nightfall Saturday; that's the most important Jewish holiday. But we are blessed with quite a lot of holidays in Judaism. Not only Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, but also Passover in the spring, Shavu'ot on the brink of summer, and Sukkot in the autumn. Two winter festivals have a lighter mood: Chanukkah, which commemorates our survival under the Greeks, and Purim, which commemorates our survival under the Persians. These are miracle holidays, associated with games and carnivals and empty calories. Chanukkah is particularly well known in America, since it competes with the splashy December holiday of the host culture.

Jews have lived in practically every country on earth. In Bible times, we were already branching out to other Mideastern lands. In later antiquity, we spread through the Roman empire, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. In the Middle Ages, many Jews resided in the Islamic world, centered in Baghdad till about 1000, then shifting westward to Spain. By and by, Jews migrated eastward from France to Germany to Poland and beyond. Jews were literate, with commercial and financial skills that other peoples might lack. Kings wishing to develop backward countries welcomed Jews in. But once the state and economy were ma-

ture, there was jealousy of the Jews, and we often had to hit the road. The Jews were persecuted in the Crusades; expelled from Spain in 1492; and slaughtered in Ukraine in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There was mass emigration from Russia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and of course the Jews fled Hitler in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The two largest Jewries in today's world, in America and Israel, are founded on immigration in the last 100 years or so. We are a people on the move.

In Judaism, children reach the age of religious responsibility at thirteen. This is called *bar mitzvah* for a boy, *bat mitzvah* for a girl. The first time they perform any adult ritual observance, such as singing the Hebrew text of the Torah in the synagogue, is a spiritual milestone. Nowadays this transition is often celebrated lavishly, with a big party and fancy presents. A major part of my job is training kids for their *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremony. We start six months in advance, but of course they procrastinate and procrastinate. Then it's a nervous breakdown in the last two weeks.

Once they're *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, young Jews are eligible to lead the community in every way. They could even blow the *shofar* at Rosh ha-Shanah. And this is such a weird activity, they show a lot of interest in it. You know, there are multiple reasons for everything in Judaism, and there are multiple reasons for sounding the *shofar*. Number one, the Bible commands it. Number two, the Talmud (Talmud Rosh ha-Shanah 16a) relates it to the binding of Isaac saga (Genesis 22:1-13). God orders Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, but when Abraham reluctantly lifts the knife, God permits him to substitute a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. So we blow the ram's horn to remind God of the story.

Maimonides, the Spanish rabbi, says the *shofar* is like an alarm clock, meant to jostle you out of your moral complacency. Sleepers awake! Slumberers arouse! Examine your deeds, and repent! (Hilchot T'shuvah 3:4) Even though it's all crammed into just ten days a year, repentance is the real point of Judaism. The scripture calls Israel to be God's treasure people, a dominion of priests (Exodus 19:5-6), a light unto the nations (Isaiah 49:6). How are we

qualified to fill these roles? We're not – yet. We're working on it.

## Adult Education

Thirty-two students signed up for my fall class at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), at Mountaineer Mall off Green Bag Road. The course was entitled "Old Testament Rituals: Don't Try These at Home!" I was available at TOL each following Wednesday evening for those unable to attend at OLLI.

For the six sessions of the class, I grouped observances from the Hebrew scriptures into six broad categories: birth and death, healing, sex and marriage, holidays, sacrifices, and purification. I linked Biblical ceremonies to modern experiences: every culture has birth and death rituals, for example, or marriage rituals. If the procedures of the ancient Israelites seem peculiar, our modern way of doing things has its own quirks. My objective was to dissolve the aura of strangeness around practices from another place and time.

I like teaching at OLLI or other non-synagogue venues. My classes draw a bigger and more various crowd, a wider range of perspectives and attitudes, than we would be likely to see at TOL. I learn more from the students, and they learn more from each other, thanks to the diversity of their backgrounds. Though the days or times of my classes may not suit every potential attendee, I'm not aware of any significant drawbacks to using OLLI as my main teaching site. Please let me know if you feel differently.

## Children's and Youth Programs

*Margalit Persing*

The Sunday School curriculum of Mitzvot (Jewish Values) has focused on Jewish holidays and the commandments fulfilled in different holiday observances. Skits and games helped teach the values of charity and kindness to others, not only at the High Holidays, but year round.

The weekly 10:00-10:45 family

service includes One Sentence Torah and Haftarah portions and blessings. September services provided opportunities for learning the blessings and some High Holiday melodies. The two oldest classes provided sermons, one for the Sunday preceding Rosh HaShanah and the mitzvah of sounding the Shofar, and the other for the Simchat Torah service, which features the unrolling of the Torah scroll around the synagogue.

Sunday, Oct. 16 was Sukkah building with families and children creating a beautiful Sukkah. Pizza in the Hut on Oct. 21 continues our yearly Sukkoth celebration followed by Simchat Torah on Sunday, Oct 23.

Rabbi Joe conducted children's services on the first day of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur morning. Following the children's service, several parents, teachers and madrichim provided games and activities for the young ones while their parents attended services.

Hebrew School continues with three classes: beginner, intermediate and Bnai Mitzvah. Two students are preparing for their Bnai Mitzvah, one in January and another in April.

Sunday School is off to another vibrant start under Rabbi Joe's leadership. Join us any Sunday morning at 10:00 am for our Family Service. Remember, you don't have to be accompanied by a child!



Maimonides' Statue  
Old Jewish Quarter  
Cordoba Spain



### **Bnai Mitzvah and Beyond: A Special Holiday Educational Experience** *Margalit Persing*

On Sunday, Oct 9, teen education began with a very special program, a panel on "Growing Up Jewish in Another Country". Cantor Daniel Hazan shared experiences of his early childhood in Morocco, and later years in South America and Mexico. Aryeh Gingold described the early days of the State of Israel, and his growing up years, while Monique Gingold shared her family's experience of life in Europe, and her childhood in Canada. Students and parents alike were fascinated by the stories of the challenges they faced.

Social Events began with pizza and bowling at the Mountainlair on October 15. A movie night is scheduled for November 12 at TOL from 6:00-9:00 pm. Movie to be determined! We are a small but growing group. Bring a friend and come on over!

### **Will We Still Be There Tomorrow?**

It's a party! Chanukah is coming and our family is looking forward to the Tree of Life (TOL) congregation's holiday party. Our new oral history book reveals that TOL has been in our area since the 1920s. Do we expect that TOL will always be here for our families?

We are blessed with a full-time Rabbi, who provides spiritual guidance and education for adults and our children. A full house at High Holidays reminds us that all are welcome without charge. Our memorial boards fully-lit on Yom Kippur also recaps the loss of other congregations in our area— did you notice the lights from Fairmont and Clarksburg in addition to TOL?

Do we believe that TOL will

be here for all time? Will our memorial boards be lit elsewhere in future? We are fortunate to have congregants who support the temple with their dues, other contributions and volunteer committee work. Without such membership commitments our congregation might go the way of other congregations in our area.

I decided to move to the Morgantown area because they had a Jewish community and synagogue. Joining as a member and volunteering made me feel connected to that community. Over the years I made friends who provided support and companionship.

If your family looks forward to participating in TOL events we hope you will continue your support with membership in TOL and service to our Jewish community.

*Shalom and Happy Holidays,  
Lee B. Kass  
(former TOL board member)*

### **TOL Kids Celebrate Sukkot**

*Photos: Monique*



## **Chanukah Lights Tonight**

*BY STEVEN SCHNEIDER*

Our annual prairie Chanukah party—  
latkes, kugel, cherry blintzes.  
Friends arrive from nearby towns  
and dance the twist to “Chanukah Lights Tonight,”  
spin like a dreidel to a klezmer hit.

The candles flicker in the window.  
Outside, ponderosa pines are tied in red bows.  
If you squint,  
the neighbors’ Christmas lights  
look like the Omaha skyline.

The smell of oil is in the air.  
We drift off to childhood  
where we spent our gelt  
on baseball cards and matinees,  
cream sodas and potato knishes.

No delis in our neighborhood,  
only the wind howling over the crushed corn stalks.  
Inside, we try to sweep the darkness out,  
waiting for the Messiah to knock,  
wanting to know if he can join the party.

## **Light the Festive Candles**

*By Aileen Lucia Fisher*

Light the first of eight tonight—  
the farthest candle to the right.

Light the first and second, too,  
when tomorrow's day is through.

Then light three, and then light four—  
every dusk one candle more

Till all eight burn bright and high,  
honoring a day gone by

When the Temple was restored,  
rescued from the Syrian lord,

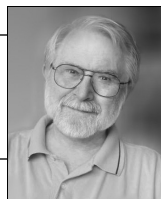
And an eight-day feast proclaimed—  
The Festival of Lights—well named

To celebrate the joyous day  
when we regained the right to pray  
to our one God in our own way.

## **Israeli Dancing for Sukkot**







Ed  
Gerson

The buzzwords “transitioning” and “engagement” describe Tree of Life during 2016. How to gauge the activities? My personal dashboard is the faces of those who are energized and involved, or just ready for a personal challenge beneficial to our temple. Eager to learn. I prefer an intuitive approach. The old vertical vs. horizontal hierarchy discussion is OK, but in a volunteer organization, it starts with the person rather than the job description. There's an old saying: Don't bet on the horse, bet on the jockey.

Some people just have a sparkle. With regrets, we said goodbye to some wonderful and very dedicated people in 2016: Michelle, Brian, Nina. New leadership stepped up, and we refocused to retain and attract new members. The Outreach and the Membership Committees became one committee with a broader scope: designing new membership materials, the website, and organizing the recent ice cream picnic and the book launch event for Morgantown Jewish Heritage: An Oral History. The Ritual Committee's enormous task of planning High Holy Days with Rabbi Joe and our Cantor, Daniel Hazan, really shined this year. Marty Sippin has worked tirelessly on repairs to our winter heating system, updating our lighting, and even hanging artwork.

With the board members' elections in January, there will be new Trustee and committee leadership openings. Please contact me or anyone on the board if you know of promising talents who have skill sets and willing abilities to fulfill these new opportunities. Our goal is to continue and to increase our presence as a place for Jewish assembly, study, and prayer.

*Shalom - Ed Gerson*

### Yizkor Book Todah

Thank you to the generous sponsors of the 2016/5777 Yizkor Book. Special thanks to Judy Cohen for a great job proof reading. Damaged files made it particularly important this year. And, as always, thank you to Ed for his support.

*Sylvia L. Cooper*

### Family & Friends Sponsors

Agmon, Aric  
Cohen, Robert & Kathy Abate  
Cohen, Stan & Judy  
Rosenbaum, Shirley  
Sippin, Marty  
Stitzel, Judith Gold  
Tanner, Reed & Cindy

### Dedicated Page Sponsors

Berrebi, Albert Denise & Fortune  
Brager, Paul & Laurie  
Cohen, Richard  
Cohen, Stan & Judy  
Cooper, Sylvia  
Friedberg, James & Helene  
Gerson, Ed & Donna  
Giannopoulos, Myrna Barron & friends  
Hample, Rabbi Joe & Wendell, Barry L  
Herbst, Linda  
Hirsch, Edward  
Klein, Lillian  
Lass, Norman & Martha  
Lees, Gloria  
Mall, Howard  
Petsonk, Lee & Brown, Susan  
Rosen, David  
Simmons, Leonard & Eleanor  
Stolzenberg, Merle and Alan  
Tanner, Reed & Cindy  
Weiss, Ken & Saralouise

### Simchat Torah Celebration

Photos Lee Petsonk



**Todah  
to  
Margalit Persing  
Our Newsletter  
Proof Reader.**

## Community Sharing

10

*We note with  
sorrow  
the passing of*

*Jackie Berman,  
cousin of Aric Agmon*

*Gene Wilder,  
beloved movie star*

*Jean Walters,  
aunt of Bonnie Sharkey*

*Shirley Colton,  
aunt of Rich Cohen*

*Robert Rosefsky,  
father of Adam Rosefsky*

*Audrey Rothenberg,  
cousin of Marty Sippin*

*Shim'on Peres,  
former president of Israel*

*Nancy de Platchett,  
friend of Barry Wendell*

*May their memory  
be a blessing*



Remember a loved one  
with a  
**Yahrzeit Plaque**

\$400 DONATION

Contact: Merle Stolzenberg  
mpstolzen@yahoo.com

## Facilitate a Miracle

The dreidel says *A Great Miracle Happened There*. TOL will settle for a small miracle, here.

Just need some angelic congregants to assist in setting up and cleaning up for the December 18th Hanukkah Party. Help dress the tables. Set up the buffet. Escort the inevitable detritus to a dignified, trashcan assisted departure.

Contact Richard Cohen (rpc116c@gmail.com) to volunteer to stand in for the Maccabees. Do a mitzvah. Get a preview taste of latkes hot off the grill!

## Hadassah's Hanukkah Holiday Celebration

**Thursday  
December 8th  
6:00 pm**

**Rosa Becker's Home**

Bring a veggie-dairy dish to share.  
Friends always welcome.  
Since the party is pre Hanukkah, no mass menorah lighting this year.

### PROGRAM

Linda Herbst will demonstrate how to make a simple but elegant menorah

## Invitation to a Friday night oneg

We all enjoy a tasty oneg (snack) at Friday night services, but it doesn't happen by itself. As agreed at the February 9 congregational meeting, each member family is encouraged to volunteer to provide one Friday night oneg per year: two families a week. Onegs might honor a loved one's memory, or a family birthday

For the "Wine and Cheese" Shabbat, Sisterhood will provide the wine; congregants are invited to bring cheese and crackers. When it is a "Mazal Tov" Shabbat, Susan Brown provides a cake; a family is needed to bring other refreshments. Food should be vegetarian.

Please go to <http://etzhaim.org/Oneg29.pdf> for a copy of this year's oneg schedule To host (provide refreshments), for 5776-7 please contact Laura Cohen, lcohenwv@gmail.com; or Richard Cohen, rpc116c@gmail.com, 304-292-3695

**Share Your Simcha  
Buy a Leaf on  
THE SIMCHA TREE**

**\$250/leaf  
\$2500/Small Stone  
\$5000/Large Stone  
Contact**

**Merle Stolzenberg  
mpstolzen@yahoo.com**



## Calendar - November/December

11

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016			
11/2/16	Wednesday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
11/3/16	Thursday	Adult ed: "Hebrew Bible Rituals" at OLLI, Mountaineer Mall	3:00-4:50 pm
11/4/16	Friday	Potluck & short service from children's prayerbook	6:30-8:00 pm
11/5/16	Saturday	Torah study: Noach	10:00 am – 12:00 noon
11/10/16	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
11/11/16	Friday	"It's morning somewhere" service & oneg	7:30-9:00 pm
11/12/16	Saturday	Full Torah service followed by potluck kiddush	10:00 am – 1:00 pm
11/12/16	Saturday	Teen pizza & movie TBA	6:00-9:00 pm
11/17/16	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
11/18/16	Friday	Healing service & oneg	7:30-9:00 pm
11/19/16	Saturday	Bagel brunch & short service	10:00 am – 12:00 noon
11/19/16	Saturday	"Bimah to Broadway" potluck-havdalah-show with Cantor-Rabbi Mark Perman	7:00-9:00 pm
11/25/16	Thursday	Sorry, no rabbi's drop-in office hours	
11/26/16	Friday	Sorry, no program	
11/27/16	Saturday	Sorry, no program	
12/1/16	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
12/2/16	Friday	Micro service & oneg	7:30-9:00 pm
12/3/16	Saturday	Bagel brunch & short service	10:00 am – 12:00 noon
12/8/16	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
		Hadassah Hanukkah Party @ Rosa's home	6:00 pm
12/9/16	Friday	Mazzal Tov Shabbat: October-November-December	7:30-9:00 pm
12/10/16	Saturday	Torah study: Va-yetzé	10:00 am – 12:00 noon
12/15/16	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
12/16/16	Friday	Mostly English service & oneg	7:30-9:00 pm
12/17/16	Saturday	Full Torah service followed by potluck kiddush	10:00 am – 1:00 pm
12/18/16	Sunday	Latke party & Chanukkah celebration	5:00-8:00 pm
12/22/16	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
12/23/16	Friday	Sorry, no program	
12/24/16	Saturday	Sorry, no program	
12/29/16	Thursday	Sorry, no rabbi's drop-in office hours	
12/30/16	Friday	Sorry, no program	
12/31/16	Saturday	Sorry, no program	
1/5/17	Thursday	Rabbi's drop-in office hours	1:00-5:00 pm
1/6/17	Friday	Kabbalat Shabbat in honor of Rachel Works	7:30-9:00 pm
1/7/17	Saturday	Rachel Works Bat Mitzvah & Kiddush Luncheon	10:00 am – 1:00 pm





**Tree of Life Congregation**  
PO Box 791  
Morgantown, WV 26507-0791  
(304) 292-7029  
<http://etzheim.org>

## FIRST CLASS MAIL



## Women of Faith Luncheon



Oct 13, 2016 - "Women of Faith" at Knights of Columbus Hall in Star City WV. Meeting and luncheon included the Catholic Daughters (the sponsors), Tree of Life Congregation, and Wesley United Methodist Church.

Visit <http://etzheim.org>