

# The Shofar



May 2016  
Nissan-Iyar 5776

## A Message from Rabbi Jordi Gendra



### It's cool to be smart

When Michelle Obama paid a surprise visit to London's Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School, on the day of the G20 Summit in 2010, the most inspiring part wasn't the delirium of the schoolgirls at her arrival, or the spontaneous hugs, but the

message she gave to the girls of this inner-city school, of whom a fifth are children of refugees or asylum seekers, and 92 percent are from a black or minority background. As she shared with the girls her wonder that a black woman from southside Chicago should have become First Lady of the United States, she summed up the message of her life experience with the words, "If you want to know the reason why I'm standing here, it's because of education...I liked being smart...I thought being smart was cooler than anything in the world."

We, descendants of a more ancient slavery, could say the same. That the reason the Jewish people are still here, apart from dogged determination, is thanks to an abiding devotion to education. Out of that will to know, to understand, grew the Bible, the dialogue of a people with an invisible God; and out of that grew the Talmud, the most prolonged and intensive educational text in human history.

We trained for smartness, among other diaspora survival skills, and when the forces of history brought down the ghetto walls, we brought that thirst for knowledge out of the yeshivah and applied it to science, literature, psychology, music, and so on, to the immense benefit of humanity.

A famous Rabbinic wordplay underlines the link between knowledge and freedom. When the Torah states: "The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets," the Rabbis wrote in the Pirkei Avot, "Do not read *charut* (engraved) but *cherut* (freedom) — for only one who engages in Torah study is truly free." I have interpreted the wordplay to mean that only the moral law brings true freedom and equality, instead of the law of the jungle, whereby the strong dominate the weak. More broadly, however, we could see the Rabbis saying that only study frees the mind to question and gives people opportunities to grow and fulfill their potential.



The Rabbis raised another question: What is study for? Should it be for its own sake, or a means to an end? The Talmud recalls a second-century debate, when the question was posed: Which is greater, study or action? The pragmatic Rabbi Tarfon maintained that action is greater, while the academic Rabbi Akiva contended that study is superior.

All the sages present then agreed that study is indeed greater — because it leads to action! The commentator Rashi tersely notes that, in that case, action is really greater, for the end is always more important than the means. The debate is still alive today in rival theories of schooling, and those who espouse the value of a broad liberal education would contend that, even if Shakespeare, for example, has little relevance to earning a living, the insight he gives into the human mind and heart makes for a more rounded individual and a more deeply lived life.

A further twist in the Talmudic tale distinguishes between learning and teaching, and Rashi's grandson Rabbenu Tam explains that, even if action is the ultimate goal of one's own study, teaching others is superior to any other occupation. Far from the contemptuous popular adage, "Those who can't do, teach," Judaism sees the teacher as combining study and action in the greatest possible endeavor for the good of others.

While preparing for Pesach, I thought of kids with disabilities, and while I was working on the message of freedom contained in the Haggadah, the bitter irony struck me, that many of these children would never know freedoms we take for granted — to move our limbs, walk or run, communicate in speech, even to eat without assistance.

But then another thought struck me: that in other countries or other ages, children like these would be shunned at best, at worst not allowed even to live, while here they are being taught and cared for lovingly so that they can achieve the maximum potential in their lives. It is cool to be smart, and the coolest thing for our society is to ensure that every child and adult has the opportunity to be as smart as they can. That is the freedom engraved on the tablets, which we celebrate at Shavuot: that every life has value; and that to learn, and teach, and keep the commandments of love and justice, is the way for every person to express the value of their lives, achieve their potential and build a better world.

## From the President's Desk by Debbi Ret



Three years that I could never have imagined. It's been a wild ride. I remember during my first six months as president, saying, "This is easy. I don't know what all the fuss is about." Famous last words!

So, in the spring of 2014, I heard for the first time this synagogue's favorite phrase, and I opened my

first can of worms. I have opened many since then. You have no idea how many times I was tempted to bring a can of worms to a board or committee meeting and open it. Some of the cans were mine. Some belonged to others, but I helped promote them. Some of these ideas have been successful; others, less so.

Here are some of this community's more successful initiatives over the past two years:

- Hiring a Spanish rabbi. We did not all become Spanish, but we did all become more open minded.
- Free tuition for Kindergarten through second grade and membership not required to receive the free Kindergarten tuition. This was made possible by several generous donations and has helped to significantly grow our Hebrew school and our membership.
- Expanding music on Friday nights. First with guitar, then with Shir Hadash involving multiple instruments two times/year. Then keyboard in addition to guitar. This month

we will experiment with music on a Saturday for the first time. And in September we will have music to accompany the choir on Erev Rosh Hashanah.

- Along with the music, we have hired a cantor for the High Holidays, which was standard practice for our members formerly of Beth Israel, but a first for the rest of us.
- Free High Holiday tickets in 2014, also through a generous donation. Because it proved to be so successful, we continued this in 2015 and will do so again in 2016, even without the donation.
- Hiring a Tot Shabbat leader. We have received much positive feedback from the Tot Shabbat families. For this coming year, we will put more effort into advertising this outside of our four walls so that we can attract more families who are not yet part of CBT-BI.
- Hiring an executive director. A generous donation, supplemented by other donations, has helped to make this possible. The executive director has already increased efficiency of synagogue management and eased the burden on the president.

It's been a great three years and I would like to thank all of you for being there to help and encourage me. I'm sure you all join me in welcoming our next president and seeing what cans of worms she will open!

Todah Rabah!

Debbi

## Upcoming Events

*Click on events in **red** for more information.*

- Wednesday, May 4, 6:30-8:30 PM: Re'ut BBYO Holocaust Remembrance Day Service
- Sunday, May 8, 9:30 AM: Mother's Day Brunch, sponsored by the Men's Club
- Sunday, May 15, 7 PM: General Membership Meeting
- Thursday, May 26, 6-10 PM: **End-of-the-Year Dinner** at The Washington, Turnersville
- Sunday, June 5, 11 AM-3 PM: **Community Barbecue**, Washington Lake Park

## A Message from Wendy Marder, Educational Director



Some of our students, teachers, and parents attended the *geniza* ceremony at Crescent Memorial Park last month.

*Geniza* is a special burial area for sacred books and religious objects, which cannot just be thrown away. Rabbi Gary Gans led the service and the students

were amazed at the huge amount of stuff that was being buried. A truck pulled into the cemetery and dumped its contents, which included prayerbooks, tallitot, and other holy items, and even some items that didn't need a holy burial.

This trip to the cemetery was part of the final chapters of our confirmation's life cycle curriculum this year. From birth to death, they learned, discussed, listened to speakers, and playacted their stuffed animals in b'nai mitzvah and weddings. Death is a part of life and in Judaism we encourage people to speak of their loved ones and keep their memories alive. We participate in shiva, and make a minyan for kaddish, and we make sure there's always enough food.

At Crescent Memorial Park, our beloved teacher and friend Luisa Ragonese is buried and thus the picture of her headstone, taken by one of our students. The rocks on top signify that people visited her and still remember her. Accompanying the students on the trip was Suzy, Luisa's sister, who had come to class last year and spoke to the students about Buddhism. She and Iris and the students made an interesting day even more special with memories of Luisa making them laugh and smile.

Josh, a seventh grader, got to visit the grave of his grandmother, Susan Ross. With Lynn and Mike Berman's assistance and some special stones they had in their car just for the purpose of putting them on a grave, he was able to pay his respects and leave his "calling card."

Using their phones, the kids and teachers took lots of pictures of different graves to discuss in class. The letters and symbols all mean something. For example, if there is a pitcher or water vessels on the stone, that signifies that the person was a Levi, who poured water for the high priests in the Temple. If there are two hands, the person was a Kohane (priest). The letters *pay* and *nun* are put on the grave to signify the words *po nikbar* — "here is hidden..."

Many CBT-BI former members and relatives are buried in Crescent, including Elaine Zucker, our former rebbetzin, teacher, and principal.

At first the students were not too thrilled to be learning about death and dying but discussing the Jewish customs that accompany this final life cycle event made them realize that people live on forever in spirit in those who loved them and it is comforting to know that only the physical life of a person has ended. The more that person has done while alive, the more he/she will be remembered.

I recall going to a funeral on my birthday one year and thinking beforehand that this wasn't a very good way to spend a birthday. After sitting through one beautiful eulogy after another, listening to all that this special man had done, all the lives he had touched, and the legacy he was leaving behind, I knew I had made the right decision to go. It made my birthday even more of a celebration, gave me inspiration to make it an even better year, and to strive to be loved and respected and spoken about the way this man was.

In the past few months there have been a number of deaths, more than usual, for our small congregation, and I had the honor of leading shiva at least one night for all of them. Listening to the stories of these people I didn't know that well before was like opening a door to their lives and the lives of their loved ones who were mourning, but remembering them with such fondness.

Jewish life cycle events are filled with ceremony and detail. They bring out emotions and make you feel deeply. There has to be at least 10 people, a minyan, to say certain prayers, and that is also good because it brings people together. May we keep in mind all those who have gone before us and learn from them and may we celebrate more good times than bad, but find the good in every day and everyone.

— Wendy



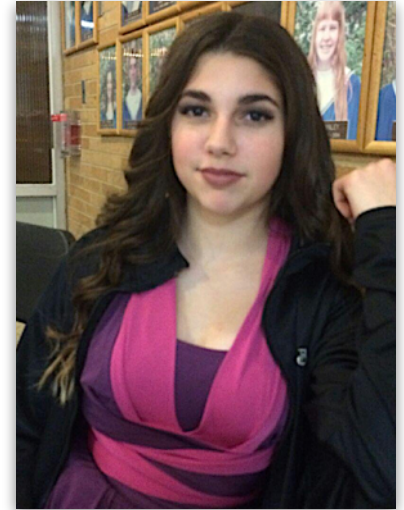


## Meet Our Bat Mitzvah: Malena Lomanno

Malena Lomanno, daughter of Melissa and Chris, and sister of Giovanni, Kingston, and Lucian, will become a bat mitzvah on Saturday, May 14. Her Torah portion is *Kedoshim*, which teaches us how to be holy through interaction with our fellow human beings, how to treat them fairly, and thus make the world a better place. Malena's mitzvah project truly exemplifies this and along with her family, she made numerous trips to LOVE Park in Philadelphia to feed the homeless.

Her biggest challenge to becoming a bat mitzvah was learning her haftarah, but it has helped her become more responsible. Involved in dance, color guard, marching band, and swimming, Malena leads a very busy life.

Although she is very grateful for her wonderful family, she appreciates having time and space to herself once in a while. She expresses special thanks to her tutor Dara and her teachers, and is most looking forward to her party. So Miriam Sara bat Yochana — mazel tov! — and we look forward to sharing this special time with you and your family.



## JFCS Provides Resources to the Elderly

Earlier this year, the Bikur Cholim committee and Sisterhood co-sponsored a program regarding community services for the elderly, presented by Samost Jewish Family and Children's Services of Southern New Jersey (JFCS). Listed below are the highlights of services offered. Call 856-424-1333, email [supportgroups@jfcsnj.org](mailto:supportgroups@jfcsnj.org), or visit [www.jfcssnj.org](http://www.jfcssnj.org) for information on eligibility and fees.

- **Resource consultants** provide assistance with specific services, such as insurance coverage, legal services and senior housing. Consultants can schedule individual meetings, provide information, and make referrals.
- **Mental health counseling** is available from licensed clinical social workers
- **Social work and nursing visits** include services such as case management, setting up in-home services, medication assistance, and monitoring of medical needs.
- **Home care services** include assistance with bathing and dressing, companion care, and housekeeping services.

- **Delivered kosher meals** are available for \$7 per meal. Call 856-424-118, x1181 for information.
- A **patient advocacy program** called *Patient Partners* is available for people who feel overwhelmed managing all aspects of their care and treatments. Trained volunteers assist as patient advocates and help with health care issues, such as communication with medical professionals, doctor visits, and medications.
- A variety of **support groups** are available, including bereavement support, aging and adjustment, widow and widowers, and dementia caregivers.
- **Services to specific groups** — Holocaust survivor services include home care, support visits, and transportation. Veterans support includes transportation to veterans from fellow veterans and local volunteers.

This is only a summary of the many services that are available. Call the JFCS office for additional resources.

—Myra Caplan, Bikur Cholim committee chair



## Mazel Tov to Our Educator of the Year!

Congratulations to Renee Klavens, our 3rd and 4th grade teacher, who will receive a 2016 Educator Award for Jewish Education in South Jersey, presented by the Jewish Federation's Department of Jewish Education. Please join us at a special dessert ceremony on Wednesday, June 1, 7 to 8:30 PM at the JCC, 1301 Springdale Rd., Cherry Hill. Click [here](http://jewishsouthjersey.org/educatorawards) to register for this event, or go to [jewishsouthjersey.org/educatorawards](http://jewishsouthjersey.org/educatorawards).



Hear the CBT-BI Choir perform at the

## 51st Annual Delaware Valley Jewish Choral Festival

Wednesday, June 8, 7:30 PM

Temple Emanuel  
1101 Springdale Rd., Cherry Hill



This event will feature singing groups from all over the Delaware Valley. Come out to hear great music and support your synagogue! Admission is free. Guests are encouraged to bring an item or two to donate to the Samost Jewish Family & Children's Service food pantry.

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### Community Barbecue

June 5, 11 AM-3 PM

Washington Lake Park, Pavilion A

Join us at our free, year-end event!  
Please bring a parve side dish or dessert.

RSVP by May 22 to Susan Krantweiss (856-589-4572)  
or Sevena Sacks (856-931-8570).



## Two Choruses Create One Voice at CBT-BI



*The CBT-BI Choir and the Community Chorus of Rowan College at Gloucester County teamed up last month for a first-of-its kind choral concert at CBT-BI. Thank you to everyone who helped set up, contributed to the reception, and came out to hear the music!*

Todd Schachter, DO

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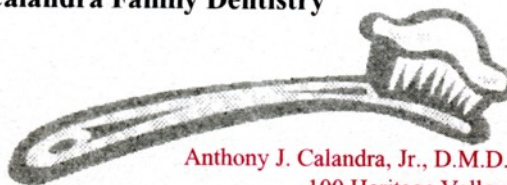
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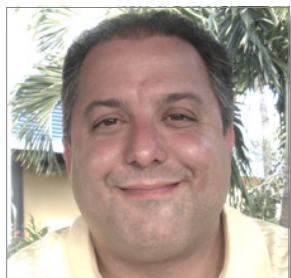


## Kids Celebrate Passover — with Special Guests

On a Sunday morning last month, our Kindergarten and first grade students made charoset for the school-wide Seder and participated in their own Passover celebration, which they shared with their teddy bears.



## Men's Club News by Jordan Harris



The Men's Club had a strong start to the spring by co-hosting a lunch gathering with Sisterhood at the Peking Buffet in Glassboro in early March. Long-standing members had the opportunity to dine alongside newer members with families, enjoying everything from soup and sushi to ice cream and cakes.

We also assisted CBT-BI's Parent-Teacher Organization with hosting boardwalk-style games at the Purim carnival. Our members did a terrific job coming together to run the balloon and shave and bowling games, two activities that were a hit with all of our religious school students.

The Men's Club also welcomed spring with a visit to the Battleship New Jersey on the Camden waterfront in April. This will measure up to be one of our strongest events of the year, allowing members to visit one of South Jersey's primary attractions while paying homage to those who have fought to keep our freedoms and make us safe — all while enjoying a

gorgeous spring day and looking out at the Philadelphia skyline! Other potential trip ideas later in the year include a possible visit to the World War II museum in Washington, D.C. and making a trek across the Delaware River to attend a Philadelphia Soul indoor arena football game.

One of the best ways for members to have an input on event ideas and planning is to attend our monthly breakfast meetings, usually held on the first Sunday of the month at either area diners or CBT-BI. It is a great forum to present ideas for future events or offer suggestions on how the Men's Club can be improved. The meetings are also a terrific avenue for socialization; very often, our discussions can go from synagogue matters to sports to politics in a very short period.

As I have mentioned in previous columns, if you have not had the opportunity to attend a Men's Club event or have not been in a while, please take the opportunity to attend one of our breakfast meetings, bring your game skills to our card/game nights (fourth Thursday of the month) or check the calendar for some of our upcoming events that will interest you. There's plenty of laughs and fun to be had at our events. See you at the next one!

## Sisterhood News by Luba Veytsman



The month of March was very busy for our Sisterhood. We helped with the Purim Carnival, baked a lot of Hamentashen, and had our first women's Passover Seder. Thank you all who worked very hard to make these events successful.

Our next program, scheduled for May 22 at Meryl's house, will be a tea party in honor of the 150th anniversary of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. A flyer with all the details will be sent shortly.

Other events include a Sisterhood-led Saturday Shabbat service on June 4, and our end-of-the-year dinner at Randazzo's on June 9. Again, please check the flyers. I look forward to seeing you all at our events.

Shalom,  
Luba

## Thank you, CBT-BI Family!

Michael and I would like to thank everyone who was there for us when Michael's father passed away April 1 — a bad April Fool's prank. This was such a hard time for us. We are so touched by the outpouring of love and support all of you have given our family. Thanks for the shiva tray of good food and all your cards and donations. Marcy Kaufman, one of our dearest friends, opened up her home for us for a third night of shiva so people in the township would be able to attend, too. — Sharon & Michael Richman

## *The Shofar*

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