



A Message from Rabbi Rachel

Purim & Modesty



Walking home from pick-up with my daughter Fay, we stopped to chat with neighbors. Making conversation, our neighbor Anna asked what Fay's favorite topic at school was. Fay answered, "I'm a really excellent reader." I added, with a wink, "And she's really modest, too."

On the way home, Fay and I talked about the word "modest." I don't think this is a word Fay has come across outside our family, and I don't think that's because she's only seven. Modesty isn't something we talk about so much here in the U.S.

When many Americans think about modesty, we think about concepts we find outmoded about how we should dress. But, Jewishly, modesty about beliefs and about attitudes is much more central.

The classical source on modesty is from Micah 6:8, where the prophet declares: *[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Eternal require of you: simply to do justice, to act with lovingkindness, and to walk modestly/humbly with your God?*

The Hebrew word *tzniut* for "modesty" is the same one as "humbleness." On top of doing justice, and acting with lovingkindness, Micah chooses modesty as what God wants of us. But what does this mean?

One way I like to think of modesty is by taking the kippah as an analogy. There is a place, maybe right above our heads, where we need to realize that our own self-importance ends. That there is

Something bigger than us, Something more important than any of us as individuals. We live our lives for Something bigger than the fulfillment of our own desires. Some of us call this Something "God."

Purim plays with the concepts of humbleness and modesty, and reinforces these values in us. In the Purim story, Esther's name means "hidden." She is characterized as humble and modest. As we know, God is not referenced in the text, and is hidden behind it. Esther and God both model modesty.

As we interact with the Purim story, we are given the mitzvah on Purim to get so intoxicated that we don't know the difference between "Blessed be Mordecai" and "Cursed be Haman." We are told

explicitly that we as humans are mixed up, and sometimes too mixed up to trust our own conceptions of what is good and what is evil. We don't have to be intoxicated with alcohol to be mixed up; our intoxication comes from many sources, including simply the confusion of life.

The mitzvah of *tzedakah*, charity, on Purim can be seen the same way. Who are WE to choose where our money goes? We're certainly not better than those who have less; we need to have some modesty. It's simply random that we have more, while others have less. Better to share the money around, to even out the randomness of distribution.

As I think about the divisiveness of our country, of our world, at this time, in this season, I go back to modesty. Like myself as a mom, I wonder, wouldn't we

all be better off if we taught, and lived, more humbly, and modestly?

Let's take a note from Micah, and let Purim motivate us do justice, loving-kindness, and walk humbly and modestly in the world. Chag Purim Sameach! Happy Purim!



From the President's Desk by Lori Samilson

Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are!



Maybe you have not heard that before the secular New Year CBTBI eliminated all of the COVID restrictions with the exception of the mask requirement. It is very possible that the mask restrictions will be lifted in the near future and we are looking for ways to safely serve food in the

synagogue. We have many fun and exciting events planned for the rest of the year and, now that it is safer, we are asking you to come out and reconnect with your synagogue family!

At our family services this past Shabbat, one of the questions that the Rabbi and the congregation discussed was why we have services. Of course, thanking HaShem and praying were some obvious answers. Other important answers included creating and supporting the community and just coming out to be with our friends, or extended family. I know how much easier it is to relax in your PJs and watch services streamed on Facebook, but the ruach that we feel when we gather in person cannot be duplicated via streaming. If you are able, please join us in person and get reacquainted with your CBTBI family.

The Megillah reading will take place on March 16. That will mark two years since the last large holiday celebration that took place within our walls. You and your families deserve to participate in a fun evening of costumes, noisemaking, balloons, and laughter.

On the evenings of March 19 and 20, the choir and friends will be performing our annual Purim shpiel, "It's a Shidduch," an original production written and directed by Josh and Norma Meyer. Learn about the young lady who fell from a star called "Jer-see." Learn how lives were changed and saved when black and white cookies were replaced with technicolor hamantashen, thus defeating the evil Primemamzer Haman and his more evil Mrs. Primemamzer.



When I first considered taking the position of president, my first order of business was going to be planning a big party to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the CBT and BI merger. COVID ended that idea. The good news is that we are planning to go ahead with our end of the year dinner in May — the first since 2019. Please join us that evening to celebrate our re-opening. Nothing that has happened in the past two years was what I had planned or hoped for our community; the least we deserve is a gala community celebration!



**Celebrate Purim at CBTBI...
IN PERSON!**

Wednesday, March 16, 6:30 PM:

→ **Megillah Reading** ←

Please bring the copy of "The Whole Megillah" that went home last year.



**Saturday & Sunday,
March 19 & 20, 7:30 PM:**

→ **The Purim Shpiel!** ←
"It's a Shidduch"
Great fun for all!



A Message from Wendy Marder, Educational Director



Our 7th grade is reading *Maus*. It was banned in Tennessee for nudity, and other supposedly inappropriate content. Art Spiegelman, the author, used mice in his graphic novel to depict his family members and other people in his story. Who knew

nude mice were offensive?

Our students well understand that this book banning was more about denial of the Holocaust and are grateful to be students in a school system that teaches real history. They admitted also, that when books are banned or things are forbidden, those things become more attractive and intriguing, so banning *Maus* has now resulted in more copies than ever being sold and read.



Art wrote *Maus* as a kind of cathartic journal but realized how valuable it was to teach history and humanize even the worst of life's experiences. He wrote it to try to understand his father better and improve their relationship but in this personal journey, he ended up educating so many. Better to read and discuss difficult topics than to forbid them.

Our 5th and 6th graders have read about and presented famous historical Jewish figures or figures who have had a powerful impact on the Jews. Rather than just read through pages of history, they are researching and sharing what they find. Interesting how many of the same problems in history are apparent today. People's personalities and pursuit of peace or power make all the difference in what happens in our world.



Our 3rd and 4th graders are learning to read Hebrew fluently and also prepare for their Chag HaSiddur — receiving their first prayerbook. They will lead Friday night services, speak a bit about their “Jewish Me” and receive their first prayer book. Save the date: May 13.

Our Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd graders are being introduced to everything Jewish, through stories and crafts, videos, and games. They are learning about mitzvot and holidays and Bible stories and can recognize Hebrew letters and words! Most importantly, they are at home at CBTBI and enjoying their Jewish connection.

So, whether in person or remote, CBTBI students and congregants have learned how to connect to participate in Jewish life and learning. Purim teaches us that not everything can be immediately seen in life, that there is a hidden agenda, if you care to look.

We have been terribly affected by COVID and will never be the same, but we also have benefited from the adaptations to life we had to make. The hidden gifts of learning to treasure the simpler, quieter ways of life, nature, being with your closest family and friends, and using technology to come together instead of canceling events, have been the blessings amidst the curses.

As we move towards more freedom, may we cherish the memories of those we have lost to the pandemic or other illnesses and may we bring them honor by bringing joy and gladness to each day, as we are told to do in the Megillah.

Purim Sameach 😊

Wendy



The Shofar

Editor: Lisa Parker
editor@cbtbi.org

The Shofar is published four times a year. Please email editor for deadline information.

Congregation B'nai Tikvah-Beth Israel
115 East Holly Avenue, Sewell, NJ 08080
(856) 589-6550 • info@cbtbi.org • www.cbtbi.org

What Is Purim? by Emily Morinsky, 6th Grade

Hello! My name is Sarah, and I am Jewish. I live with my mom and dad. My mom is Jewish, but her family only celebrated Hanukkah. My dad isn't Jewish at all. Before, we were just celebrating Hanukkah, but my mom decided that I should go to Hebrew School and celebrate all of the Jewish holidays. But the thing is... I don't know anything!! Purim is coming up and mom said that I would be going to services. I don't really know what services are, and what we will be doing there!

It is Sunday morning, and my mom just woke me up for my first day of Hebrew School. Purim is on Wednesday, March 16, and I don't really know what to expect. My mom gave me all the books I would need, and put them in my old backpack I used in 5th grade. I am in 6th grade now, and I will be going into that grade in Hebrew School. The year in Hebrew School has already started, so everyone knows each other, and I am going to be the odd one out. Hopefully everyone is nice!

My mom just dropped me off at Hebrew School. I take a deep breath in and walk inside. I go to the 6th grade room, and see everyone. The teacher introduces me to the rest of the class. Everyone was so nice! Everyone has already been in Hebrew School since kindergarten besides me and a girl named Maya. She started coming to Hebrew School when she was in 4th grade. The teacher, Mrs. Abraham, taught everyone about Purim and said that we should all come to our synagogue for the reading of the Megillah. She said that we should all wear costumes! My mom told me about this Queen named Esther, so I'm going to dress up as her. A little bit later, my Hebrew School class made hamantashen! They are so much fun to make. You just make the dough a circle with a cup, you add filling to the middle, and pinch the edges!

It's Wednesday night, and it is time to get into my costume for Purim! I am so excited. When we get there,

I will sit in the 3rd row in the sanctuary with the rest of my class. Maya and I are friends, and she decided to dress up as Haman. Everyone was given a noisemaker and we made as much noise as we could when we heard "Haman." I smiled and made as much noise as possible when someone said "Haman." After the service, I said goodbye to my classmates and went home.

When I got home, I got a huge surprise!! My mom had made a huge plate full of hamantashen!! There were so many flavors! There was cherry, lemon, and so many more!!! I LOVE Purim!! I had so much fun at the sanctuary making tons of noise when I heard "Haman," eating and making hamantashen, and just learning about Purim in my Hebrew School class. I am so excited for next year!



Queen Esther, by Jennifer Hardy, 3rd Grade

