

Sim Shalom

Cheshvan-Kislev 5775
November-December 2014

THE NEWSLETTER OF TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL, HARLINGEN TEXAS

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Thanksgiving: A Jewish Holiday After All

By Moshe Sokolow

In 1789, in response to a resolution offered by Congressman Elias Boudinot of New Jersey, President George Washington issued a proclamation recommending that Thursday November 26th of that year “be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation.”

In New York City, Congregation Shearith Israel convened a celebration on that day at which its minister, Gershom Mendes Seixas, embraced the occasion: “As we are made equal partakers of every benefit that results from this good government; for which we cannot sufficiently adore the God of our fathers who hath manifested his care over us in this particular instance; neither can we demonstrate our sense of His benign goodness, for His favourable interposition in behalf of the inhabitants of this land.”

While the celebrations at that venerable Orthodox synagogue continue unabated to this day, other American Jewish appreciations of Thanksgiving have ranged from the skeptical to the outright antagonistic. In an essay entitled “Is Thanksgiving Kosher?” Atlanta’s Rabbi Michael Broyde examines

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

As of October 1, Bert Wolf is no longer Treasurer. He and Jamie have moved. Bert will remain active as a Board Member, but thought it best that someone who will be present full time in the Valley should be Treasurer. We want to thank Bert for all his years of service to the Temple and as Treasurer. We wish both Bert and

Jamie well on their new adventure.

We would like to thank Anne Weiss for graciously accepting the responsibility of Treasurer. We are very fortunate to have someone with Anne’s experience taking over this position. Best of Luck!

— Abby Warshowsky

Calendar

NOVEMBER

14-16 *Rabbi in town*

14 7:30 p.m. Shabbat service

15 9 a.m. Shabbat service, with Torah discussion and breakfast to follow

5:30 p.m. Movie Night: *The Jewish Cardinal* (See Page 3)

16 10 a.m. Religion School

23 10 a.m. Religion School

DECEMBER

4 7:30 p.m. Shabbat service

7 10 a.m. Religion School

14 10 a.m. Religion School

16 Erev Chanukah, first candle

17-24 Chanukah

19-21 *Rabbi in town*

19 7:30 p.m. Shabbat service
Chanukiah Service

20 9 a.m. Shabbat service, with Torah discussion and breakfast to follow

Oneg Shabbat

Each member household is asked to host one Shabbat oneg during the year. Remember hosting now involves setting up, cleaning up, and providing challah, Kosher wine, grape juice, paper/plastic goods, coffee and drinks. You can bring other treats you like, but the congregation will share the responsibility of bringing snacks and desserts. If you cannot be a host on the date assigned, please call Laurel Steinberg at 550-9530.

ONEG HOSTS

Nov. 14: Sam and Ada Barrios, Patty Gaytan

Dec 12: Stan and Nivia Fisch, Sheila Greenfeld

Jan 17: Early services and potluck Shabbat dinner coordinated by Laurel Steinberg and Bill Berg

BLOOD DRIVE SCHEDULED

Temple Beth Israel

January 11, 2015 Sunday

11:00 am-3:00 pm

Join the Temple to help those in need in the community! Donating blood is safe, it's simple, and it saves lives. Most donors find it a painless and heart-warming experience.

WHAT TO EXPECT: Donors must be at least 16 years old and weigh at least 110 pounds. All 16-year-olds and some 17-year-olds must have parent or guardian permission to donate. Every blood donation begins with an interview and a brief medical exam. The interviewer will take down the your personal information, including medical history, current health status, medications and travel history. Next, your temperature, blood pressure, pulse and blood hemoglobin level will be checked. Many donors consider this mini-physical an added bonus! If everything checks out after your interview and physical, you are ready to donate. The technician will gather your special kit with your donation materials in it. All materials used during the donation process are sterile and are used only once and then properly disposed. You cannot contract any infectious disease by donating blood.

You will relax in a comfortable chair while the technician collects your blood donation into a special container. The procedures are all different and take varying amounts of time (whole blood donations take about 10 minutes; some pheresis donations last almost 2 hours).

After your donation is complete and we outfit you with your hero's badge of honor (gauze and a colorful bandage), you will rest and enjoy refreshments. We recommend that you spend at least 15 minutes in our refreshment area to have a snack and drink plenty of fluids. Then you can resume your normal routine.

Incorporating the blood drives in your religious education classes is a great way to instill positive values and the power of community service. In the RGV we need to collect 175 units of blood daily to provide an adequate supply for the patients in the hospitals we serve. Donating blood is a voluntary service that is made possible only through organizations, religious and educational institutions partnering with United Blood Services with blood drive sponsorship programs. — Candy Sorayah Iannelli, Donor Recruitment Representative

NEWS

■ SCRIP CARDS AVAILABLE:

\$100 HEB, \$100 WALMART, \$25 CINEMARK

These cash cards are like money at the store — but a portion of your purchase will go to our temple. See Alma Russek or call her at 970-7722.

■ **RATES FOR MEMORIAL PLAQUES:** Our rate for a memorial plaque on our memorial wall is \$350. Or you can buy two for \$600. Please contact Bert Wolf, or any board member to purchase a memorial plaque.

■ **HONOR A LOVED ONE OR A SPECIAL OCCASION** with an engraved plaque on a Pew. The cost is \$1250. See Bert Wolf or any board member to make arrangements.

■ **HADASSAH NEWS:** During the months of October and November, Hadassah is working on the Check It Out program for Junior and Senior high schools to teach them about breast self exam. We will resume our regularly scheduled programming in December.

Thank You

DONATIONS

YIZKOR FUND

Ron & Dyan Banks and Quentin
Keyes for Frank Fridkin, Dorothy
Fridkin, Albert Fridkin, Fran
Bockius

Sheila Greenfeld for Harry
Greenfeld, Gertrude Greenfeld
and Leslie Mc Daniel

Dr. Stan & Nivia Fisch
Samuel & Ada Barrios for Isaac
Inocencio

Robert I & Anne B. Weiss
Rene & Eliza Gonzalez
Fernando & Alma Russek Jr.
Abby Warshowsky
Mary H. Warshowsky
Charlene Moskal

GENERAL FUND

Susan Ander for Rosh Hashanah
Expenses

William H & Judith Rabel in
memory of Marvin Sondock

Bert & Jamie Wolf for flowers on
Rosh Hashanah

Dominic & Linda Braune

Oziel & Dalila Gonzalez

Bruce Landsman

Rene & Eliza Gonzalez

Samuel & Ada Barrios

SUNDAY SCHOOL FUND

Richard & Christine Newman

Jesus & Angela Silguero

Abby Warshowsky

Fernando & Alma Russek Jr. in
honor of Dr. Stan Fisch's birthday

Fernando & Alma Russek Jr. in
honor of Mary Warshowsky's
birthday

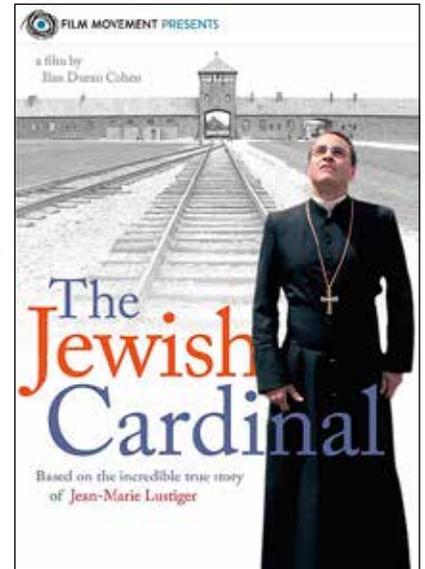
MOVIE NIGHT

Saturday, November 15

5:30 p.m.

The Jewish Cardinal tells the amazing true story of Jean-Marie Lustiger, the son of Polish-Jewish immigrants, who maintained his cultural identity as a Jew even after converting to Catholicism at a young age, and later joining the priesthood. Quickly rising within the ranks of the Church, Lustiger was appointed Archbishop of Paris by Pope Jean Paul II — and found a new platform to celebrate his dual identity as a Catholic Jew, earning him both friends and enemies from either group. When Carmelite nuns settle down to build a convent within the cursed walls of Auschwitz, Lustiger finds himself a mediator between the two communities — and may be forced at last to choose his side.

— *Film Movement*



Celebrations

BIRTHDAYS

11/06 Moniel Feuerman Powell
 1/6 Susie Weisberg
 11/8 Laurie Anne Jacobson
 11/11 Luis Gonzalez
 11/12 Jacquelyn Stewart
 11/13 Benjamin M. Yudesis
 11/14 Monica Stewart Weisberg
 11/18 Elizabeth Holzman
 11/20 Charlene Moskal Stegman
 11/20 Deborah Shoshana Russek
 11/27 Renata Sobelman
 11/29 Ari Holzman
 12/4 Ivan Shirazi
 12/7 Liliana Cohen
 12/10 Jan Cassidy
 12/10 Lori Suissa
 12/17 David Goldstein
 12/20 Jose Cohen
 12/21 Jacquelyn Goldstein
 12/21 David Martin Jacobson
 1/9 Rosalie Berg
 1/13 Gabriel Hernandez
 1/18 Nivia Fisch
 1/18 Zendaya Newman
 1/23 Zachary Wolf

2/4 Fernando A. Russek
 2/7 William C. Stewart
 2/10 Laurie Joseph
 2/15 Joshua Jacobson
 2/18 Brett Wolf
 2/20 Bill Berg
 3/14 Gerald Sondock
 3/16 Meredith Linsky
 3/19 Bert Wolf
 3/22 Dan Simha

ANNIVERSARIES

11/7 Gerald & Shirley Sondock
 11/17 Jan Cassidy & Joel Smith
 11/20 David & Elizabeth Goldstein
 12/16 Fernando & Alma Russek
 1/1 Ronald & Dyan Banks
 2/6 Christine & Richard Newman
 2/7 Jose & Liliana Cohen
 3/7 Dr. Stan & Nivia Fisch
 3/20 Paul & Sofia Shirazi
 5/29 Bill & Monica Stewart
 5/30 Bill Berg & Laurel Steinberg

Did we miss you?

Please send birthdays & anniversaries
to laurie.b.joseph@gmail.com.

Thanksgiving: A Jewish Holiday After All

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three rabbis' halakhic positions on the subject: that of Yitzhak Hutner, who ruled Thanksgiving a Gentile holiday and forbade any recognition of it; that of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who regarded it as a secular holiday and permitted its celebration (particularly by eating turkey), and that of Moshe Feinstein, who permitted turkey but prohibited any other celebration because of reservations over the recognition of even secular holidays.

Newly presented historical information, however, may swing the annual autumnal pendulum back in favor of participation in what now appears to have begun as a holiday with both a patent Jewish theme and associated rituals. In his recent book, *Making Haste From Babylon*, Nick Bunker reveals an item of particular significance for both Jewish observers and critics of Thanksgiving.

Fleeing from persecution in England, the Pilgrim passengers on the Mayflower brought along their principal source of religious inspiration and comfort: the Bible. One particular edition of the Bible (published in 1618) is known to have been in the possession of none other than William Bradford, who would later serve as governor of Plymouth Colony. This edition was supplemented by the Annotations of a Puritan scholar named Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622).

Shortly after their landfall in November 1620, Bradford led the new arrivals in thanking God for the safe journey that brought them to America by reciting verses from Psalm 107. Curiously, Ainsworth's Annotations to verse 32 of that psalm ("And let them exalt him in the church of the people, and praise him in the sitting of the elders") contains the following remarks:

"And from this Psalme, and this verse of it, the Hebrues have this Canon; Foure must confess (unto God) The sick, when he is healed; the prisoner when he is released out of bonds; they that goe down to sea, when they are come up (to land); and wayfaring men, when they are come to the inhabited land. And they must make confession before ten men, and two of them wise men, Psal. 107. 32. And the manner of confessing and blessing is thus; He standeth among them and blesseth the Lord, the King eternal, that bounteously rewardeth good things unto sinners, etc. Maimony in Misn. Treat. Of Blessings, chap. 10, sect. 8."

If any of this looks familiar, it is because Ainsworth essentially copied over an English version of Maimonides' comprehensive legal code, the Mishneh Torah (in Ainsworth's rendering, Maimony Misn.), Hilkhoh Berakhot (Treat. of Blessings) 10:8, which prescribes the four conditions under which *birkat ha-gomel*, the blessing after being spared from mortal danger (itself derived from Psalm 107), is to be publicly recited. Citing additional verses from the psalm, Bradford compared the Pilgrims' arrival in America to the Jews' crossing of the Sinai Desert, corresponding to "wayfaring men, when they are come to the inhabited land"—one of the four conditions requiring "confession."

Bunker argues, consequently, that the very first prayer the Pilgrims recited immediately upon their arrival in the New World had its origins in a distinctly Jewish practice. Accordingly, he considers this prayer service to be the original "Thanksgiving" — a service which predated, by a full year, the three days of feasting that served as the basis for the current American holiday.

Even without turkey and cranberry sauce, this vestige of Jewish influence on the religious mores of the U.S. is worth our acknowledgment and contemplation — and, of course, our thanksgiving.

Moshe Sokolow, professor of Jewish education at the Azrieli Graduate School of Yeshiva University, is the author of Studies in the Weekly Parashah Based on the Lessons of Nehama Leibowitz (2008). He wrote this essay in 2011.

