

SHORESH

שורש

**Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News**

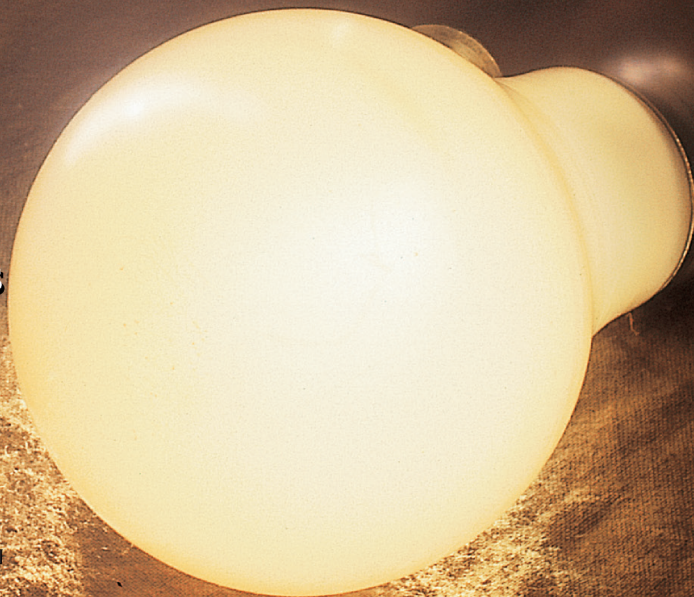
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Planting our Garden
People and Programs**



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Busy Times at Congregation Etz Chayim

by Claudia Griner

There has been a lot of activity going on at Congregation Etz Chayim since I started working here as program director at the end of August 2018.

For those who don't know me, I was born in Argentina, and moved to Winnipeg a little more than 18 years ago. I have worked for the Jewish community my entire life, both here and abroad.

I have been extremely busy since starting work at CEC, trying to get to know the Etz Chayim family and create community engagement and awareness about our synagogue and all it has to offer.

I've been involved with Kabbalat Shabbat events and Junior Congregation, and have arranged programs in celebration of Sukkot, Chanukah, Tu B'Shvat, Purim, Passover and Shavuot. Working closely with the larger Jewish community, I have helped our congregants commemorate the Holocaust, celebrate the founding of Israel on Yom Ha'atzmaut, and enjoy many opportunities to 'lunch and learn.'

I am especially excited about our new garden project, Gan Chayim. Thanks to the support of Keaton Gall and family, the garden has brought an eager inter-generational group of members together to create a beautiful and functional outdoor space.

There are many other programs and plans in the works at Etz Chayim for congregants of every age, and I hope that you will come to shul to experience them. Please contact me if you would like to volunteer with any of our activities, or if you have program ideas of your own that you would like to share with me.

I look forward to meeting many more of you. ■



Claudia Griner CEC Program Director.

We're Listening

CEC's new "Shma Koleinu/Hearing Our Voices" listening sessions are intended to provide members with the opportunity to interface with Rabbi Kliel, affirm their relationship with the synagogue, and share their ideas about how CEC can become more user-friendly and more supportive of individual spiritual journeys. At the same time, the sessions are designed to give the synagogue leadership the opportunity to listen to and respond to congregants' concerns and ideas. The sessions, which are deliberately organized to accommodate 8-10 people at a time, will resume in the fall.

Please contact the office if you are interested in participating in an upcoming session. ■



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Shavuot, A Holiday that Deserves Commemoration

by Rabbi Klief Rose

Shalom U'vracha!



"I believe that we each have a calling to mark this holiday by coming together as a congregation"

I am pleased that the timing of this publication gives me the opportunity to write about Shavuot, which takes place the first week of June.

I have a sense that as a community we are all deeply attuned to the important Jewish holidays and days of commemoration that fall in the month of May, including Yom Ha'atzmaut and Lag B'Omer. However, I fear that we may have lost sight of Shavuot, one of the *Shalosh R'galim*—three pilgrimage festivals, and a major festival that often goes unnoticed by so many in our Diaspora Jewish communities.

Shavuot is a day which we have been anticipating and preparing for since the second Seder of Passover (when we begin to count the Omer). *S'firat Ha'Omer* is the counting of 49 days. It was originally rooted in the agricultural cycle, when farmers would count their sheaves of barley. Later on, it was given an overlay of meaning by the rabbis in the Talmud who offered a theory that this was the time of preparing for the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. This served to prepare Jews for the impending "marriage ceremony" between the Children of Israel and God. The fascinating part of this concept is that the Torah itself functioned as the *ketubah* or the wedding contract/covenant between these two parties.

I am not sure to what to attribute our lack of interest in Shavuot. It is one of my absolute favourite Jewish holidays (which could be related to the fact that there was always cheesecake). There are many reasons why Shavuot should be at the fore of our thinking and inspire us to observe this sacred *chag*/holiday.

A theologically challenging teaching from the Talmud posits that God "held" Mount Sinai over the heads of our ancient Israelite ancestors and threatened to annihilate them unless they immediately accepted the Torah. At first blush it would not be a surprise if many of you bristled at the notion of this "forced measure"—the lack of free will/volition. How could God possibly do such a thing? Why do we—later generations of Jews—feel any sense of responsibility in the direction of the Torah if it was "foisted upon us" by an apparently "tyrannical, unyielding deity"? Moreover, how does this later rabbinic reflection jive with the well known notion that we hear

about (explicitly) in the text of the Torah—*Naaseh VeNishmah*—"We (the generation who stood at Mount Sinai) will unequivocally pledge to observe the principles of the Torah and then hear its details"?

Obviously there are many possible answers to this apparent paradox. One thought is that the rabbis of the Talmud desired to protect our ancestors from being branded as outright "scoundrels and transgressors." After all, if they accepted the Torah under duress, they could not be held legally accountable for the fashioning and worshipping of the Golden Calf. No group of people can be held culpable for regulations that they don't fully know or understand!

The rabbis seem to be suggesting that our people only fully accepted the Torah and its teachings several hundred years after the Revelation at Sinai. We Conservative Jews see ourselves as the inheritors of the rabbinic tradition—brimming with creativity, flexibility and courage. For us, such examples of rabbinic reinterpretation and reframing enable us to address—with respect and deference as well as with confidence—characteristics of our tradition which are off-putting; elements that run contrary to our contemporary sensibilities. Not only do we see this process as our sacred obligation—in order to ensure the relevance of Torah—we see it as a direct continuity of the path laid out for us by the rabbis of antiquity.

With this idea before you, let me suggest that there is a compelling reason to celebrate Shavuot this year. I believe that we each have a calling to mark this holiday by coming together as a congregation to generate meaning for a community of spiritual seekers.

That is why, with deep respect and affection, I would ask you to join me on the evening of Saturday, June 8th, for the start of this most fascinating Jewish holiday. The holiday commemoration, being held in conjunction with our city's other congregations and taking place at Herzlia Adas Yeshurun Synagogue, will include a *Mincha* service, rabbinic panel, breakout learning sessions, *Havdalah* and, of course, cheesecake. ■

Max Hochman kibitzes that he should be given a key to the doors of Etz Chayim. After all, he says, he has been going there “forever.”

Well, maybe not forever, he admits, but for the last 50 years for sure.

“I think I put in more time there than anybody else,” he adds with a chuckle.

Max began attending daily minyans at the synagogue in its earlier iteration as Rosh Pina, when he and his wife Sara moved with their children to a home on Tate Avenue right behind the synagogue. That was in the mid-1960s.

“Morning minyans were never a problem,” Max recalls, “Because they were always at the same time.”

But the evening minyans, he adds, used to be at different times, depending on the time of year and the sunset, and getting there was sometimes a little challenging. Still, he says, he managed to attend the minyan every evening, 365 days a year, even when he was working full-time and had three young children at home.

In fact, it is only in the last few months that Max has stopped attending synagogue every day. And that is only because his physician has advised him that, at 97 years of age, Max should start taking it easy. So now, Max limits his synagogue attendance to every Thursday evening, Friday evening and Shabbat morning. He’s also in shul for every Yom Tov and festival.

Max became a regular shul goer when he married Sara (Raber) in 1946.

“She was very religious,” he recalls, “and synagogue was very important to her.”

Judaism was equally important to Max’s parents, Hymie and Sarah, but because they ended up in small town Saskatchewan after emigrating from Russia in 1922 with newborn Max, they had no access to a Jewish community or a synagogue.

Max’s youth was also marred by tragedy. His mother took ill when he was just six-years-old and passed away five years later, and his younger brother Leon got sick and passed away a few years after that. Max says he still thinks of them every time he is in shul. His one other sibling, a 95-year-old younger sister named Anne, is alive and well in Los Angeles where she has lived for decades.

When Max was 15, his father and step-mother Etta (Gochman) sent him to Winnipeg to work at a photo developing company owned by Etta’s relatives. By then, Max’s father was barely eking out a living with his small grocery store and regrettably could no longer support his oldest

child. In Winnipeg, Max lived with Etta’s good friend, a recent widow and mother of two boys who warmly welcomed Max with the greeting, “from now on until you decide to leave, I am your third mother.”

When WWII broke out in September 1939, 17-year-old Max tried to enlist in the Air Force but was turned away because of his age. He successfully enlisted a year later, and spent the next five years stationed in Summerside, Prince Edward Island as an on-the-ground wireless operator.

When the war ended, Max returned to Winnipeg, married Sara, and began looking for work. He approached a cousin who owned a large appliance company for a job, but the cousin turned him down. Three years later, the cousin reconsidered and offered Max a job that paid much better than what he was earning at the time. Sara insisted that Max accept the job, and he spent the next 40 years working in sales and looking after all of the company’s tenders, just with his grade nine education.

Max retired at age 68, but he has never stopped working. He has been a volunteer now for almost 30 years! He spent 18 years at the Health Sciences hospital gift shop, 20 years delivering Meals on Wheels, and 17 years running the weekly Bingo game at the Sharon Home on Magnus Avenue with Sara. He and Sara also volunteered at the Folklorama Israel pavilion for years, and Max continued to do so after Sara passed away in 2002. He is surely Folklorama’s oldest volunteer!

In between volunteer gigs and minyan attendance, and weekly excursions to the Stay Young Club at the Asper campus, Max enjoys spending time with his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. All three of his children and their partners treat him exceptionally well, he says, and he is grateful for their love, attention and home cooking.

Family and volunteering, Max confesses, might be two of the “secrets” to his long life. The other one, he adds, has been synagogue attendance.

Like volunteering, synagogue participation ensures that Max gets out of the house, socializes, meets new people, learns new things, and feels good about what he is doing.

While he admits that he doesn’t know or remember the names of all of the Etz Chayim regulars he sees at synagogue, he does know all of their faces. And those faces all know who he is.

He’s the gentle, kind, soft-spoken, self-effacing older man who gets to shul a half hour before anyone else. He’s the guy who deserves a key to the front door. ■



Marvin on Max

Max Hochman is a familiar face around Etz Chayim, but CEC past-president Marvin Samphir has probably known him longer than anyone else at the synagogue.

“I know Max to be a true mensch,” Marvin says of the man he first met more than 40 years ago. “He is a steadfast supporter of our shul, and devoted, perhaps to a fault, to that which he gives his support.”

Regardless of the weather or how he might be feeling, Marvin continues, Max makes every effort to attend Shabbat services and other synagogue events as often as he can.

“It is always a pleasure to see him in shul,” Marvin adds. “He is a link to the past, and his presence demonstrates that there can be many more members of our congregation and the community who could find relevance and comfort in what we have to offer them.” ■

High Holy Days Choir in Capable Hands

Sarah Sommer's name is gradually becoming synonymous with choral music in Winnipeg. The 27-year-old Gray Academy alumna sings in several choirs, performs as a soloist with several choirs, directs several choirs, and teaches choral music in two public elementary schools.

As of this spring, she is also the High Holy Days choir director at Congregation Etz Chayim.

And chazzanit Tracy Kasner Greaves is thrilled about that.

"I am so excited about working with Sarah Sommer as Director of our Congregation Etz Chayim High Holy Days choir," says Tracy.

"Sarah has a unique ability for teaching and leading, guiding and inspiring people into their best vocal performances."

"She has a gentle yet confident and steady way of directing," Tracy continues, "And I know her approach to the music will challenge us all to bring our congregation to new spiritual heights."

Sarah and Tracy's association dates back to when Tracy was teaching at Gray

Academy of Jewish Education and Sarah was an elementary school student. More recently, they frequently crossed paths at Etz Chayim, where Sarah taught the Mitzvah Minds class for two years and sang in the High Holy Days choir for about seven years under the direction of Lina Streltsov.

Sarah and Tracy also share their devotion to the Chai Folk Ensemble, co-founded by Sarah's grandmother and namesake. Sarah, who began voice lessons at age 12, sang with Chai for almost a decade and served as its vocal director for five years. Currently, Sarah directs the Chai affiliated Yona Jewish Children's Choir, and assists with both the Winnipeg Girls' Choir and the Winnipeg Boys' Choir. She also is co-founder and co-director, with her husband Justin Odwak, of the Rady JCC's Kolot choir. Somehow, Sarah also finds time to sing with the Camerata Nova and Canzona choirs, and teach Bnai Mitzvot, piano and voice to private students.

Sarah also has served as guest conductor for the Winnipeg School Division's honour choirs, and taught musical theatre classes for children

through the University of Manitoba's Preparatory Studies. Sarah is a graduate of the University of Manitoba's Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Education programs.

As Sarah's teaching duties at Brock Corydon and Harrow School have started to wind down for the year, she has begun focusing on the CEC choir.

"I started rehearsing with the choir in late spring and will continue throughout the summer in preparation for the High Holy Days in the fall," Sarah says.

While she acknowledges the huge responsibility that she is assuming, she is also grateful for the honour and the opportunity to create music for the holiest days on the Jewish calendar.

"I am looking forward to sharing my knowledge and expertise of choral music and the voice with the singers, and working towards bringing further refinement and musical excellence to their sound," she says.

"I know that for many people, the music is the focal point of their High Holy Days experience." ■

MEMBER NEWS & LIFE-CYCLE EVENTS

BIRTHDAYS

MARCH

Lindsay Sawyer Fay, Marilyn Golub, Marvin Kass, Shirley Kozlowich, Cindy Lazar, Edward Lazar, Marli Lerner, Mark Tolchinsky

APRIL

Sabrina Bokser, Gail Cantor, Fred Cooperman, Betty Ann Hershfield, Sara Hochman, Jack Litvak, Andrea Roitman, Pearl Rosenberg, Rosalind Shapiro

MAY

Meira Cook, Mervin Drabinsky, Sheldon Glow, Herb Grosney, Earl Hershfield, Brian Hirsch, Dawn Katz, Ed Shinewald, Debbie Stern

JUNE

Archie Cham, Morris Chapnick, Barney Charach, Sandy Cohen, Steven Hyman, Mark Libin, Beverley Lockshin, Reesa Ostrove, Rita Swire

JULY

Harriet Cipilinski, Gail Hechter, Patricia Hyman, Rhoda Kagan, Murray Katz, Benson Labinsky, Rochelle Litvack, Gary Margolis, Sheldon Margolis, Raymond Reider, Gwen Satran, Arlene Wiener

AUGUST

Lindsay Berger, Alejandro Eilberg, Richard Gall, Lori Hurtig, Reva Stone

SEPTEMBER

Regan Katz, Shayna Shulman

OCTOBER

Ed Calnitsky, Kathy Cobor, Bruce Granove, Glory Pudavick, Ian Rayter, Dawn Rittberg, Carla Rubenfeld, Allan Shinfield, Alex Singer, Laurie Solomo

ANNIVERSARIES

MARCH

Linda & Fivie Gunn (45), Claudia & Walter Griner (20)

MAY

Alissa Schacter & Michael Conner (20)

JUNE

Sharron & Joel Dudeck (50), Emily & Marvin Shane (50),

Lynn & Henry Wolfe (50), Harriet & Carey Boroditsky (45), Gail & Alex Katz (45)

JULY

Rosalind & Peter Olin (50), Jodi & Howie Gilmore (35), Catherine & Robert Tallman (35), Shawnee & Harvey Greenberg (30), Claretta Shefrin & Morley Wiseman (30)

AUGUST

Serky & Ben Goldberg (60), Brenda & Marvin Kass (50), Dina & Bruce Granove (45), Ricki & Gary Jacobson (45), Linda & Ed Feuer (40), Debra & Norman Yusim (40), Marnie Hellner & Grant Goldberg (25), Leah Craven & Steven London (25), Sharon & Jonathan Goldenberg (15)

SEPTEMBER

Debbie & Steven Mintz (45), Wendy & Alan Daien (30), Judy & Lawrence Shiffman (30), Tammy & Wayne Singer (15)

OCTOBER

Jan & Jerry Klein (40), Cheryl & Murray Katz (25), Sharon Maltz & Howard Jesierski (25), Bonnie & Steven Buchalter (20)

MAZEL TOVS

Sharon & Benson Labinsky on the birth of a great granddaughter Talya

Sharon & Benson Labinsky on the marriage of their grandchildren Meira & Avi

Sharon & Benson Labinsky on the

Spotlight on Sima



Sima Feuer (right) with youth programming committee members (l to r) Sheryl Singer, Sabrina Bokser and Leah Craven.

Sima Feuer has been spending a lot of time at Etz Chayim.

She is one of the congregation's newest and youngest board members, as well as the new volunteer chair of the synagogue's youth programming committee. She also is spearheading the synagogue's innovative gardening project, Gan Chayim.

The youth programming committee is responsible for a variety of the synagogue's youth activities and events, including Shabbat Junior Congregation, High Holy Days Junior Congregation and the Purim Palooza. It is a small committee, Sima says, and they are always on the lookout for additional members to share ideas, provide input and assist with the programs.

The gardening project committee is also starting out small, but is expected to grow along with the community garden.

The gardening project was created to bring together synagogue members of all ages. Its 'green thumb' members began meeting regularly in the early spring to build planters and plant seedlings, and to map out the flower, herb and vegetable garden on the north side of the building.

"I think that it is a fantastic way to get families and members of all ages involved in the synagogue and the Etz Chayim community," Sima says. "The harvested vegetables will be shared with the congregation as well as donated to a local charity."

While Sima is happy to volunteer for both these synagogue initiatives she is quick to give credit to Etz Chayim's program director, Claudia Griner.

"Claudia, in her position at the synagogue, does a fantastic job coordinating and running these programs," Sima says. ■



The Galls and Gan Chayim

CEC is extremely grateful to the Gall family for their generous support of our new community garden, Gan Chayim, in honour of Keaton Gall's Bar Mitzvah last fall.

Keaton and his family, in turn, are particularly pleased and excited that the garden will benefit both the synagogue as well as the surrounding community. Keaton is a wonderful, caring and generous young man, and the garden accurately reflects the core value of 'giving back' that has been instilled in him from a very early age.

All of CEC's staff, volunteers, congregants, and of course, the Gall family, look forward to seeing Gan Chayim grow and flourish. ■

marriage of their grandchildren Coleman & Chava Shayna & Merrill Shulman on the birth of their granddaughter Alia Shulman-Abed Sheila (Cookie) Billinghamurst on being reelected as School Trustee for Pembina Trails School Division Sheryl Singer & Kevin Segall on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Hayden in February Myrna & Herb Singer on the Bar Mitzvah of their grandson Hayden Segall Esther & Marvin Samphir on

the B'not Mitzvah of their granddaughters Lily and Sophie Halpern Susan & Jonathan Buchwald on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Matthew in March Silvana Fux & Carlos Benesdra on the Bat Mitzvah of their daughter Ashley in May Adriana & Marcelo Josebachvili on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Matti on June 1 Sharon Graham on the Bat Mitzvah of her daughter Talia Gabor on June 22 Cindy Lazar & Joel Kay on the Bat

Mitzvah of their daughter Rachel Kay on June 29 Bonnie & Steven Buchalter on the B'nai Mitzvah of their children Jada & Seth on August 31 Jack Buchalter on the B'nai Mitzvah of his grandchildren Jada & Seth Buchalter Gerry Baker on the B'nai Mitzvah of her great grandchildren Jada & Seth Buchalter Ardith Henoach on the Bat Mitzvah of her daughter Emunah Bitton on September 1 Leah Craven & Steven London on the Bar Mitzvah of

their son Michael on October 12 Ed Shinewald on the Bat Mitzvah of his granddaughter Orly Shinewald on October 19 Ingrid Neumarkt & Alejandro Eilberg on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Max Eilberg on October 19 Susan & Howard Tennenhouse on the birth of a grandson Ilana Simon & Ari Marantz on the birth of a grandson Sabrina & Javier Bokser on the Bar Mitzvah of their son David in May

Mazel Tov Congregation Etz Chayim members who received Shem Tov Awards at the Jewish Federation Kavod Evening on May 16th

Elana Schultz, B'nai Brith Jewish Community Camp Avery Spigelman, Gwen Sectar Creative Living Centre Sherrill Levene, Jewish Federation of Winnipeg Sybil Steele, Shalom Residences

Thank you to the following congregants for contributing to the Shabbat

morning Bagel Dough Fund.

Norman Freedman, Gail & Ted Hechter, Adeena Lungen, Jane & Ronald Reider, Colette Rubin, Judy Schnoor, Alexander Singer & Elissa Abrams

IN MEMORIAM

Faye Tessler Murray Sparber Naomi Chapman Ruth Moscovitch Aleck Stone Zalman (Bob) Shuster Arnold Frieman Laurie Mainster

Thank you to Mr. Ryan Downey from RBC Dominion securities for his generous donation

CEC's Holiday Camps

Three times a year, CEC partners with the Gray Academy of Jewish Education to give children who are off school on those days a unique holiday experience. These holiday celebrations, called Holiday Camps, take place on Sukkot, Simchat Torah and Shavuot.

Each of the holiday camps is held at the synagogue and involves a day of holiday related programming. This programming includes kid-friendly tefillah, or prayer services, in the morning and fun group activities, like drama games, arts and crafts and gymnastics, in the afternoon. Etz Chayim provides both lunch and snacks to the children, and Gray Academy looks after the program registration and staffing. ■

Synagogue Fundamentals and Fun at Junior Congregation

Junior Congregation has been a staple of the CEC Saturday morning Shabbat services for years. In fact, many of the high school and university students who now lead the program, started off in the program as participants when they were just kids of five and six years old.

The pre-school part of Junior Congregation is now called Shabbat Camp. Intended for children from kindergarten to grade four, it is modelled after the successful holiday camps that CEC runs with Gray Academy during the festivals of Sukkot, Simchat Torah and Shavuot.

Both the Saturday Shabbat Camp and the regular Junior Congregation program, which is designed for children in grade five and up, focus on the unique experience of celebrating Shabbat in synagogue.

"The idea behind Junior Congregation," explains Cantor Tracy Greaves, "is to make children think of synagogue as their home and their comfort zone."

Both programs encourage participation from all those in attendance, and incorporate musical motifs, the language of t'fillot and lessons from the weekly Torah reading into their programming.

"We try to create a comforting and enriching experience for the children, and to make them synagogue literate," Tracy adds. "The overall intention of the content is to provide the children with skills they will need to be active and fulfilled congregants just before and immediately beyond reaching the age of mitzvot."

The Junior Congregation portion of the program also aims to empower its participants to guide and direct their own services.

"Our goal," Tracy continues, "is to empower our youth with the inspiration and the knowledge they need to create and execute their own fulfilling and uplifting Shabbat services."

Junior Congregation and Shabbat Camp will both resume in the fall, after the High Holidays. Please contact CEC program director, Claudia Griner for further information. ■

Mitzvah Minds Introduces Children to the Joys of Jewish Life

Tracy Kasner Greaves has been a teacher, mentor and spiritual guide for countless children in the community over the years. She has patiently stood beside them and encouraged them as they have tried to master a particularly difficult trope, and she has sat back and smiled with joy as one after another they have read from the Torah with confidence and ease.

But her most rewarding career accomplishment, to date, she says has been the creation of the Mitzvah Minds program.

"Mitzvah Minds is a unique learning opportunity for elementary school students of all ages," she explains.

Tracy's inspiration for the program came from her years of experience preparing boys and girls for their B'nai Mitzvah and her years of experience as a classroom teacher.

"I realized that children would have so much more opportunity to learn if we could structure their learning as early as kindergarten and start instilling in them basic synagogue skills at a much younger age, and more importantly, instill in them comfort with and excitement about Jewish life," she says.

"I wanted to grab hold of that enormous early years learning capacity for exploring and

absorbing new information and expose young humans to the treasure chest of Jewish life."

The Mitzvah Minds program, which is held every Sunday at the Kaufman Silverberg Library at the Asper Jewish Community Campus, doubles as an enrichment education program for Jewish day school students and as a basic introduction to Judaism for students who do not attend Jewish day school.

Team teaching, led by some of Tracy's B'nai Mitzvah and Gray Academy students, ensures that all Mitzvah Mind participants receive individualized instruction. Frequent breakout sessions are equally important, ensuring that participants enjoy opportunities to explore age appropriate and grade appropriate concepts. Additionally, students in grade four and up are given the opportunity to participate in specialized activities focused on more in-depth learning that will help them with their Bar and Bat Mitzvah preparation.

"It is high energy and extremely intense and hard work," Tracy says.

But it is also extremely rewarding.

"I feel sometimes as if I am implanting into their little souls an 'inspirational hard drive chip' filled with spiritual life that they can access at any time of their lives." ■

Eating, Reading and Remembering

To help you get acquainted with people who work for Etz Chayim, Shoresh asks a quartet of synagogue folks a question (or two) about themselves in every issue. You'll hear from Rabbi

Kliel and Cantor Tracy every issue, and a different board member and staff member each time. Call it fodder for future conversation.

In this issue, the multi-part question relates to Shavuot, which begins this year on Saturday evening, June 8.



**RKR: Rabbi
Kliel Rose,
CEC Rabbi**



**CTKG:
Cantor Tracy
Kasner
Greaves,
CEC Cantor**



**SH:
Steven
Hyman,
CEC Board
Member**



**HB:
Heather
Bater, CEC
Accountant**

Shoresh: It is customary for Jewish people to eat dairy, and especially cheesecake, on Shavuot. What is your favourite kind of cake or dessert to make or bake, and why? Does it bring back memories of your childhood? Is it simply delicious? Is it easy to make?

RKR: This may seem odd coming from someone who is a vegan, but cheesecake was/is my absolute favourite dessert. As a child, Shavuot did not meet my expectations unless I had the requisite amount of cheesecake. Now that I'm a vegan I'm still able to meet this culinary requirement, but it does not include any dairy.

CTKG: I don't eat or bake cheesecake—I also don't bake anything of significance. Dessert and or baking does not resonate in any way with me. I guess my mom's honey cake—which my sister now makes—is associated with fond memories of my family tradition of dipping into schnapps on RH—but I think I was already interviewed about that in a previous edition of *Shoresh!* The honey cake is not at all easy to make; which is why I don't make it!

SH: I am a huge fan of apple cakes or any dessert that has apple and cinnamon. Growing up, my mother made a delicious apple cake that we would have for Rosh Hashana. However, as an adult, my favorite cake is an apple brown betty that my wife Ilana makes. An apple brown betty is like an apple crisp, but the topping is flour, instead of oats. It is delicious. This is our usual Shabbat dinner dessert, and I associate this dessert with the joy and relaxation that I think best occurs around a Shabbos table.

HB: My favourite type of cake is Oreo Cookie Cheesecake. I'm a baker and often make this to take to other homes for get-togethers. It's delicious and everyone loves it. I got the recipe from *Chocolate Everything* (Company's Coming). There are a lot of really good recipes in this book.

Shoresh: It is customary to read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot. What is your favourite book and why? Do you have a book that you return to on a regular basis?

RKR: One of the books I cherish most is *As a Driven Leaf*, written by the late Rabbi Milton Steinberg. The novel centers on the life of Elisha ben Abuyah, a character that originates in the Talmud and lived after the year 100 C.E. Steeped in Jewish learning, Elisha ends up reading the *Iliad*, and doing so sparks his perpetual desire for intellectual inquiry outside the realm of Halacha. When he witnesses something awful happening to a good person, he begins questioning his faith in God, and is excommunicated from the Jewish community. This begins his journey trying to merge his belief in a Creator with the rational principles of Greek logic. I generally like historical novels, and perhaps, as a child of a rabbi I was drawn to this particular book since the author was a practicing rabbi.

CTKG: I don't have a book that I have read more than once. Currently I am reading every book by Katherine Centre. I love the characters she develops. I find the way she writes to be very real and the stories grab me.

SH: My favorite book is *Sages and Dreamers* by Elie Wiesel. Wiesel presents familiar biblical figures, then

through very brilliant, yet simple questions, turns the traditional understanding of these figures up-side down and then lovingly reconstructs them so that I felt I actually understood these famous biblical figures for the first time. Wiesel's approach filled me with a sense of love for Judaism and the practice of learning, discussing, and re-learning that I think is at the heart of Jewish life. Whenever I give a D'var Torah, I attempt to use this loving approach to challenging what we thought we knew about some biblical character or aspect of Judaism.

HB: I absolutely love to read and I really enjoy murder mysteries. I don't really have a favourite book, but James Patterson is my favourite author. His books are always suspenseful and I cannot seem to put them down. He sometimes pairs with other authors, which is great as well, as it changes things up a bit. Others authors I like are Harlen Coben, Lisa Gardner and J.D. Robb. They all write excellent books, and you won't go wrong with whichever one you choose. You'll only lose sleep because you won't be able to put it down.



The Dairy Origins of Shavuot

Many of us are familiar with the tradition of eating dairy on Shavuot, but admittedly, many of us are not familiar with the reason for doing so. In fact, according to Rabbi Kliel, there is not one single reason why we eat dairy on Shavuot, but several reasons. Here are four of them:

1. In Exodus 3:8 we read that the land promised to the Israelites—Canaan or Israel—was a “land flowing with milk and honey.” Eating dairy on this holiday serves to symbolize this promise from the Divine.
2. The Book of Numbers 28:26 describes the special sacrificial meal that was offered in antiquity for Shavuot. When you take the first letter of each word in this verse, it spells out the phrase *mei halav* (from milk). This might indicate that dairy food is the desirable meal for the festival.
3. When the Israelites camped around Mt. Sinai, waiting to receive the Torah from God, they were thought to be as innocent in their spiritual development (since for 400 years they had lived as slaves in Egypt). Like newborn babies they needed to be nurtured with “milk.” In this case, they were fed by guidance from God.
4. In *Gmatría*, the mystical method of biblical exegesis, we take the number of value of one Hebrew word and connect it to another in order to illuminate the meaning of a word or verse. The Hebrew word *halav*, meaning milk, has the numeric value of 40 (‘het’=8, ‘lamed’=30, ‘vet’=2). This number corresponds to the days Moses spent on Mount Sinai waiting to receive the Ten Commandments and other teachings.

And here are four Shavuot recipes courtesy of CEC Chef Bogie:



1. Cherry Cheese Blintzes

Batter Ingredients:

4 eggs
2 cups milk
2 Tbsp. melted butter
1 ½ cup flour
¼ tsp. salt

Filling Ingredients:

1 pkg. dry cottage cheese
1 pkg. cream cheese, softened
½ cup sugar
½ tsp. vanilla extract

Sauce Ingredients:

1 lb. fresh or frozen pitted black cherries
½ cup water
¼ cup sugar
1 Tbsp. cornstarch,
1 Tbsp. water

Directions:

In a small bowl, combine eggs, milk and butter. Add flour and salt to milk mixture and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Lightly grease a nonstick frying pan and pour 1 oz. of the batter into the centre of pan. Lift and tilt pan to evenly coat bottom. Cook until top appears dry, turn over and cook 20 seconds longer. Remove to a wire rack. Repeat with remaining batter until finished. When cool, stack blintzes on plate, wrap in foil and refrigerate.

In a food processor combine all filling ingredients and mix until smooth.

Spread 1 ½ tbsp. onto each blintz. Fold opposite sides of blintzes over filling, forming a little bundle. (This can be prepared in advance and refrigerated.)

Arrange blintzes in single layer in sprayed baking pan. Dot with butter, bake uncovered in preheated 400 F oven for 15 minutes.

In a large saucepan, bring cherries, water and sugar to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Combine cornstarch and water until smooth, stir into cherry mixture. Bring to a boil, cook and stir until thickened. Serve hot over the blintzes.

2. Pizza Middle East Style

Ingredients:

1 cup chickpea flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
a few cracks of black pepper
1 cup water
olive oil, to coat the pan
About 2 tablespoons harissa (hot chili pepper paste)
1/2 large onion, chopped and caramelized
1 cup packed fresh spinach, chopped
1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

Directions:

Preheat oven to high broil. Combine the chickpea flour, baking powder, salt, and pepper, and then whisk in the water. Whisk until you have a smooth batter.

Heat a large oven safe skillet on the stove over

medium heat and coat the bottom with oil. Pour in half of the batter and tilt the pan to distribute it evenly, until it is about 8-10 inches in diameter. When the bottom is browned, flip it and brown the other side.

Remove the crust from the heat. Spread on the harissa and top with half of the onion, spinach, and mozzarella. Place in the oven for about 1-2 minutes, or until the cheese is melted. Repeat with the other half of the batter and toppings to make the second pizza.

3. Spanakopita (Spinach Pie)

Ingredients:

1 package phyllo dough
½ cup melted butter
1 large sweet onion, chopped
1 bunch green onions, chopped
½ cup chopped fresh parsley
2 cloves garlic, minced
3 pounds spinach, rinsed and chopped or
4 packages frozen chopped spinach
3 eggs well beaten
1 cup dry cottage cheese
2 cups crumbled feta cheese
1 tsp salt, pepper

Directions:

Sauté onion, green onions and garlic in butter. Add spinach and parsley and continue to sauté for about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside to cool.

In a medium bowl, mix together eggs, cottage and

feta. Stir in spinach mixture. Add salt, pepper and mix well.

Lay 1 sheet of phyllo dough in 9 x 13 inch prepared baking pan, and brush lightly with melted butter. Lay another sheet of phyllo dough on top, brush with melted butter and repeat process with four more sheets of phyllo.

Spread half spinach and cheese mixture on dough. Brush with butter, then layer 2 sheets of phyllo and brush with butter. Spread remaining mixture and top with 6 sheets of phyllo dough, brushing each with butter. Bake at 350°F for 30 to 40 minutes, until golden brown. Cut when warm with a sharp knife. Freezes well. Reheat uncovered.

4. Turkish Rice Pudding with Honey and Rose Water

Ingredients

3 ½ cups whole milk, or more as needed
½ cup honey
½ cup white rice
1 ½ tsp. rose water

Directions:

Bring milk sugar and honey to a boil in a saucepan, add rice and stir until mixture comes to a boil again. Reduce heat to low and cook until mixture becomes very creamy, about 45 minutes. Add more milk if mixture becomes too thick.

Pour rose water into mixture and stir until bubbles appear on the surface. Remove saucepan from heat and cool slightly. Pour rice pudding into a bowl or ramekin and refrigerate until chilled at least 1 hour. Serve pudding cold with fresh strawberries or any fresh berries as garnish.

B'nai Mitzvah Classes — Rigorous and Rewarding

When Rachel Kay becomes a Bat Mitzvah later this month she will confidently sing the *pesukei de zimra* and chant her Haftarah, as her parents, Cindy Lazar and Joel Kay, and her teacher, Cantor Tracy Kasner Greaves, beam with pride.

Rachel is a graduate of CEC's B'nai Mitzvah class, which she began about 18 months before her call to the Torah. The classes are held once a week on Thursdays after school in the Gray Academy's Beit Midrash.

"Students learn synagogue literacy in this class," explains Tracy.

That includes learning how the *nusach*, or prayer service, works, how to read both Torah and Haftarah trope, and how to chant and why we chant. They also learn how to lead the *Shachrit* morning service, including the *pesukei de zimra*.

"I have often referred to this class as Secret Codes and Modes," Tracy says, "because I have learned from teaching the kids that by studying the how, we are discovering an ancient code for prayer and Torah and applying it and making sense of it in a modern setting."

"Once the students catch on," she adds, "it becomes a treasured tool."

In addition to the group classes, each child receives weekly one-on-one sessions with Tracy beginning about nine months before their actual Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Those individual sessions are dedicated to reinforcing the knowledge that has been acquired in class, and ensuring that each child is capable and comfortable with the trope, the chanting and their individual Torah and Haftarah readings.

Then, a little closer to the date of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, each child starts meeting on an individual basis with Rabbi Kliel to ensure that they fully understand the meaning of their Torah *parasha*, and to discuss, debate and develop their *Dvar Torah*.

Once a month, Rabbi Kliel also meets with the entire class in an extended session in which they are joined by their parents. After eating dinner together as a group, the rabbi leads a learning session and discussion on Jewish ethics and the meaning and importance of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

"This was a really rigorous program, and my husband Joel and I like that," says



Rachel and Jack Kay with their parents Cindy Lazar and Joel Kay.

Rachel's mom, Cindy. "It impresses upon the kids the importance of what they are doing. The focus is squarely on learning, not on the party."

"By learning the service and the trope, and not just memorizing it," Cindy continues, "Rachel is really learning important skills which will allow her to more fully participate in and contribute to community life in the future."

"Learning to lead a service and to read Torah are important for the kids, and are a source of pride and accomplishment," she adds, "but I think this is even more important for the community as a whole. We all benefit from having our kids educated as Jews."

That education also has a trickle-down effect.

About a year ago, Cindy and Joel decided that they wanted to ensure that their daughter was comfortable and familiar with the Shabbat service she was expected to lead, so they began attending Saturday morning services with Rachel and her younger brother Jack.

"Joel and I marked this down as 'one of those things you do for your kid,' not for us," Cindy says candidly. "But to our surprise, we have really grown to enjoy attending the service. The sense of community is amazing, and it makes for an island of calm in a very busy week." ■



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