

# Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey



## Journal



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### *Rabbi's message*

When Barbara wrote and reminded me it was time for my “last” newsletter message, it took me aback. How was this possible? For nineteen years, I have had this monthly appointment with you. It is a strange method of communication, if you think about it. It is much more one-sided than a sermon where you are with me in the sanctuary and can react immediately. Writing a newsletter message is more like blogging. I send it off into the universe without knowing if you are reading it unless you tell me later.

In the past nineteen years, I must have written almost 200 of these messages, each one with you in mind. It has been an honor for me to have your ear in this way, as it has been an honor to be your rabbi. I am grateful for all for all these years of love and friendship. I will miss you more than I can say, but I feel better about the parting knowing that I am leaving you in wonderful hands (and by the time you receive this newsletter, you might know who my successor is).

The CCAR recently invited me to post a few blog messages on a new rabbinic blog and I wrote the first one as if I were writing my newsletter message to you. I include it here since I can't think of a better way to say thank you. I titled it, “In Praise of the Rabbinic Robe.”

My black pulpit robe has served me well in my rabbinate. It has seen me through two pregnancies and three congregations (actually six congregations if you include student biweeklies). It is older than my children. It has traveled many miles and was once lost for 6 weeks in the unclaimed luggage room at Newark Airport. Although it has been re-stitched countless times, the pocket lining continues to shred, allowing tissues and lozenges to make their way through the holes and become unreachably bunched up inside the bottom seam. I fear my old friend has become irreparably worn out.

When I took my first pulpit job in 1980, the new decade heralded the trend of discarding the rabbinic robe. It was too Protestant, too archaic and too removed for our more intimate time. I tentatively shared this information with the chair of the Rabbinic Search Committee in Dallas. In his memorable Texas drawl, he said, “I can handle hiring a female rabbi but I can't handle hiring a female rabbi who doesn't wear a robe.” That was the end of that discussion, and frankly, that was fine with me.

Wearing a robe meant not having to think about what to wear on the pulpit. That fact alone would have offered salvation to any woman living in Dallas at the time. During my five years there, I felt perpetually and inevitably underdressed. Dallas in the 80's was the city of the accessory. My congregants shopped at Neiman Marcus (Stanley Marcus' mother had been a devoted member of the congregation) before the store moved outside the borders of Texas. Even the sales women were temple members, making shopping that much more of a complicated procedure.

So the robe thankfully removed me from the congregational social competition. But more than that, it allowed the congregation to see me as a rabbi, not as a woman rabbi. The robe unified the three rabbis (two older men and I) as we stood on the pulpit. Congregants could imbue us with whatever emotional and spiritual transferences their individual psyches required. Yes, they could still see my shoes (you could write a book about how people comment on the shoes worn by female rabbis and cantors) but they were too polite in that southern way to comment to me directly. One time, a distant aunt visited Dallas and came to Shabbat services. In the receiving line, she gave me a long look and observed, "Your cousin wears a robe, too, but his is white with gold trim." That was how I found out that my cousin had moved to the Himalayas and become a serious Buddhist.

The robe issue might seem insignificant given the challenges we face in our profession, but it is symbolic of other gender-related issues in the rabbinate. Those of us who were ordained in the early days of women in the rabbinate had high hopes that our charting the way would relieve our younger female colleagues from having to fight the same battles. We have become increasingly aware that, when it comes to the rabbinate, issues of gender run deeper than we had first thought. Eliminating the rabbinic robe might have resolved some very real theological issues but has also created new ones.

During these last few years of patching my black pulpit robe, I vowed that I would not buy a new one. If I got to that point, I knew I would have to revisit the choice of whether to wear a robe at all. And so my robe will retire from the pulpit along with me this June 30. It will be just a pulpit retirement for me, not a full retirement. But for my robe, it will mean the end of a long and satisfying career.

With love,



Rabbi Ellen Lewis

## *President's message*

I have been writing this message in my head for the last year and I am still not ready to write it.

When I joined this congregation 19 years ago, there was a new rabbi at the synagogue, Rabbi Ellen Lewis. I had never been part of a congregation with a female rabbi before, but was delighted with her enthusiasm and her love for Judaism. Over the past 19 years, Rabbi Lewis and I have almost been joined at the hip, with my position in the temple being either treasurer or President for 11 of those years.

All three of my children attended Sunday school only at this temple with Rabbi Lewis guiding them through the process and assisting them in writing their D'var torah. She worked with us to have a most memorable service with Allison and Caitlin so that they could equally lead the service. She assisted Iris in her spiritual journey to convert to Judaism, which has now led Iris to chair the Ritual committee in the coming years. She assisted Charlotte and me in the teaching of the latest group of adult B'Nai Mitzvah class in assuring them that they would be prepared and ready to lead the service.

Rabbi has been my spiritual advisor for the major part of my adult life and is a part of who I am and what I stand for. The Rabbi assisted me in my largest project in the temple, which was the converting the temple to allow handicapped access to all places except the bimah, and we have always had a plan that when a person could not come up to the Bimah, we bring the Bimah down to the people. The saying that you shall not put a stumbling block before the blind was not enough for us; we needed to remove the block entirely, so that the building was available to all people.

There are so many memories of temple activities that I hold dear. Without meaning to omit anyone else's special moments, some of my favorite moments have been the enormous smile that Sarah Weinstein brings to our congregation when she is up on the bimah, and especially at her bat Mitzvah, which may have been the most special moment outside of my family times. Anyone who attended the Bar Mitzvah of my good friend Maxwell Gross could not have left the sanctuary without knowing what a special event they had just witnessed. Having Charlotte Fels read Jonah each year was a treat each and every time. And having the Rabbi ask me to call the Shofar blowing for Eric was truly special.

I will be stepping down as president of the Jewish Center after my term completes in June. But I am not going anywhere. I will still be actively involved in temple life and will do whatever I can to assist the temple in the future.

I personally want to thank Rabbi Lewis for enabling this congregation to end up after 19 years of her leadership in about the same place as she received it, a small, loving and warm place to worship and meet. Rabbi, with all of the changes over the past 19 years, the congregation is essentially the same as it was when you got here, only much wiser from your teachings. We have looked at ourselves and decided that we like who we are and where we are both physically and spiritually. That is not an easy task to accomplish over the past 19 years, as the world has undergone tremendous amounts of change, and we have remained true to our core, thanks to you.

I wish you all the best in your life and hope that we have sustained you over these years as you have sustained us.

Love, Howie



## *Mark your Calendar*

Monday, June 3	7:30 p.m.	Board Meeting
Friday, June 7	7:30 p.m.	Shabbat Services Oneg: Fesinstine family
Saturday, June 8	10:00 a.m.	Jill Fesinstine Bat Mitzvah
Sunday, June 9	9:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.	General meeting Sisterhood pot luck lunch at Rochell House
Saturday, June 15	10:30 a.m.	Torah study
Friday, June 21	7:30 p.m.	Shabbat Sevices Oneg: Parilis family
Saturday, June 22	10:00 a.m.	Rachel Parilis Bat Mitzvah
Friday, June 28	6:00 p.m.	BBQ for Rabbi Lewis Rabbi Lewis farewell service

## *Education/PTO*

Marsha Gross has been the Education Chair since Heather was in Kindergarten. Since Heather is now 14, that has been quite some time. Karen Finkelstein was by her side as co-chair for a good part of that time, and the last few years Marsha has been the chair, with Karen remaining on the Education Committee. Marsha is stepping down as the Chair, but will remain on the committee as well. We have some pretty big shoes to fill. Thank You for all that you have done for our Sunday School!



THE JEWISH CENTER OF NORTHWEST JERSEY'S  
**SHABBAT CELEBRATION**

TO HONOR

RABBI ELLEN JAY LEWIS

Friday, June 28, 2013

6 o'clock p.m.

Join our potluck barbeque outdoors on the Center grounds  
and the festive ONEG following our service  
in tribute to Rabbi's memorable years with us.

RSVP to Jeannie Berkowitz  
at [berkowitz18013@yahoo.com](mailto:berkowitz18013@yahoo.com)

or (484) 767-3744  
by June 7th.



## *Contributions*



In memory of Arthur Hertzmark  
Nancy and Bernard Robins

In memory of Rita Leiter  
Audrie Sonzogni

In memory of Norma Shifrin and Herbert Shifrin  
Laura and Paul Tarlowe

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In honor of Diane Margolin being called to the Torah  
Rita and Jerry Berkowitz  
Judy and Paul May

In honor of the naming of our granddaughters and with gratitude to Jeannie Berkowitz  
and the Bauer, Simons and Herson/Fleckes families who hosted the oneg.  
Helen and John Mattson

In honor of our confirmands; Travis Koch, Craig Kestecher, and Kelsey Shelofsky  
who made their b'nai mitzvah tutor kvell with pride and tears. You are  
wonderful ambassadors of your families, your temple, and the community  
Helen and John Mattson

In honor of our high school graduates: Jamie Fesinstine, Jamie Rosenblum, and  
Ezra Tarlowe  
Helen and John Mattson

In honor of Howie Hirsch who gave our congregation love and pride in all that he did as  
our President  
Helen and John Mattson

In honor of Rabbi Ellen Lewis for her spiritual leadership, steadfast love, and enduring  
devotion to the congregants of the Center for the past nineteen years  
Helen and John Mattson

Mazel Tov on the up-coming b'not mitzva of Jill Fesinstine and Rachel Parilis  
Helen and John Mattson

## *Announcements from the Ritual Committee*

### **Intergenerational Choir**

The Intergenerational Choir under the direction of Cantor Elizabeth Goldmann will be holding its last rehearsal before summer break on Friday, June 21, 2013 at 6:45 p.m. It is not too late to join the choir. Members of all ages and vocal ranges are welcome to attend. The choir will be performing at the Shabbat Celebration to honor Rabbi Lewis on Friday, June 28th.

### **Shabbat Celebration to Honor Rabbi Lewis**

Please join us on June 28, 2013 for a Shabbat Celebration in tribute to Rabbi Lewis's memorable years with us. The evening commences at 6 p.m. with a potluck barbeque outdoors on the Center's grounds, continues with a special service in honor of Rabbi Lewis and concludes with a festive oneg. Kindly contact Jeannie Berkowitz at [berkowitz18013@yahoo.com](mailto:berkowitz18013@yahoo.com) or (484) 767-3744 by June 7th if you plan to attend and please let her know how many people plan to attend with you and what dish/dessert you would like to share with the congregation that evening.

## *Announcements*

To all shoppers out there who like a good deal. You can get up to \$100 a year off of your temple dues by simply shopping, it's that easy. Purchase, throughout the year, \$2,000 in ShopRite scrip used for groceries and receive a \$100 reduction in dues. For more information please speak to Jennifer Rosenblum on Sundays at the temple or email her at [jrxthree@yahoo.com](mailto:jrxthree@yahoo.com)

### **Honoring Family Members and Friends**

If you would like to honor a loved one, whether family member or friend, living or deceased, there are a number of ways to do so within the tradition of tzedakah to the synagogue. You may purchase a memorial plaque for the memorial board (\$325), a pew plaque (\$250), a leaf on the simcha tree (\$180), a prayer book dedication (\$36), or a donation card (for any occasion, \$5 and up).

If you have a professional activity that you want the congregation to know about, please let us know in time to make the newsletter deadline for that month.

## ***Jewish Family Services***

Hello Everyone,

Recently Jim Aversen and I paid a visit to the office of Jewish Family Services of Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren Counties in Somerville, N.J. Our objective was to learn about this agency and its services. Although our Temple is within the area which the JFS serves, few are aware of the services they provide and/or how to access them. We are hoping to create an awareness of the JFS and to promote what it has to offer to our Temple members.

### **Did you know ?**

*Jewish Family Services offers Career Counseling Services*

*Jewish Family Services offers Family & Child Services*

*Jewish Family Services offers Emergency Assistance*

*Jewish Family Services offers Senior Support*

*Jewish Family Services provides Information and Referral Services*

*Jewish Family Services provides Family Life Education and Support*

*Jewish Family Services offers volunteer opportunities*

Other possibilities include speakers on topics of interest for both Sunday School and Adult Education.

Both Jim and I are hoping to initiate a relationship with JFS to bring their services to the Warren County area and our Temple.

If you would like information on any of these topics, you can contact the JFS directly; see number and e-mail address below. You can also contact me with any questions you may have. If I don't have the answer I will find it for you. Should anyone need transportation to the Somerville office, please contact me. ( Jeannie Berkowitz, 484-767-3744, or berkowitz18013@yahoo.com.) Pamphlets will be placed in the entrance of the Temple.

Jeannie Berkowitz  
Jim Aversen

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*JFS is a non-profit, non-sectarian social service agency whose mission  
is to preserve and strengthen the quality of individual,  
Family and community life based on Jewish values.*

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Senior Support Services              Family Life Education  
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AmeriCorps              Ohr Tikvah              Career Services

### **For more information contact:**

Jewish Family Service of Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren Counties  
150-A West High Street, Somerville, NJ 08876

908-725-7799    [Admin@JewishFamilySvc.Org](mailto:Admin@JewishFamilySvc.Org)    [www.JewishFamilySvc.Org](http://www.JewishFamilySvc.Org)

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## Upcoming Jewish LIFE Special Events include:

Jewish LIFE invites you to be part of *A Night to Celebrate Israel*, **Tuesday, May 7, 6:30 pm** at Raritan Valley Country Club, Bridgewater. Join us for an evening showing our community's support of Israel and Bond event, featuring Israeli music & dancing, dinner, fun and distinguished guest speaker Joel Mowbray, award-winning investigative journalist and nationally syndicated columnist. Honorees are Rabbi Evan Jaffe, Flemington JCC, and Raffi Mark, Rutgers Hillel Student President, who are being recognized for their dedication to their communities and the State of Israel. The fee for the evening is \$50/Adult or \$18/Student. To register, call the Birnbaum JCC at 908-725-6994 x201.

Join our community for the **Celebrate Israel Parade, Sunday, June 2** on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Show your support of Israel and be a part of the community delegation as a spectator! Fee: \$5/person includes the Coach Bus, an Israeli Flag and snacks on the bus. **All Children must be accompanied by an adult.** The Bus leaves the Birnbaum JCC, 775 Talamini Road in Bridgewater, at 9am. Only 48 seats on the bus...don't be left out! To register, call the JCC at 908-725-6994 x201. This program is made possible by a grant from the Jewish Federation of Somerset, Hunterdon & Warren Counties.

Jewish LIFE thanks everyone in our community for supporting this past year's season of special events, programs and classes. The Jewish LIFE brochure for the 2013-2014 season will be available in the fall.



**Shimon and Sara Birnbaum  
Jewish Community Center**

775 Talamini Rd  
Bridgewater, NJ 08807

**Debbie Golden**  
Special Projects Director  
Marketing Director

**(908)725-6994 x210**  
dgolden@ssbjcc.org

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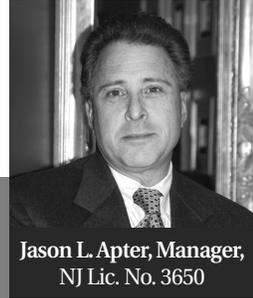
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