

TEMPLE ISAIAH  
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# The Prophet

Magazine

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Please send submission proposals to Raya Kridel, Communications Coordinator and Editor of *The Prophet Magazine*, at [Raya@templeisaiah.org](mailto:Raya@templeisaiah.org).

# Spring Holiday Highlights

## Purim

### Purim on Tap

Thursday, March 21, 7pm

Come together at Frisco Tap House with the adult community of Temple Isaiah for a night of learning and frivolity in celebration of Purim.



### Purim Family Dinner and Service

Friday, March 22, 6pm (Dinner) and 7pm (Service)

Bring the whole family and join us for dinner (pre-registration required) and/or a family-friendly service, filled with music and featuring the Purim Spiel "Aloha Esther," inspired by the music and story of Moana!

## Passover

### NO Shabbat Service

Friday, April 19

Please note that there will be NO Friday night services on the first night of Passover, so yahrzeits will be read at Saturday morning services. If you need assistance in finding a seder to attend, please contact the Temple office and we will help match you with a local seder.



### Second Seder at Temple Isaiah

Saturday, April 20

Mark your calendar! Temple Isaiah will host a Second Passover Seder again this year, led by Rabbi Axler and coordinated by members of the congregation. This will be a highly interactive and intergenerational way to make the Passover story come alive and to celebrate our festival of freedom in the midst of our TI community. More information to follow. If you are willing to help in the planning, please email [RabbiAxler@templeisaiah.org](mailto:RabbiAxler@templeisaiah.org).

Join Rabbi Axler for  
a multigenerational

# TRIP TO ISRAEL!

December 21, 2019–  
January 1, 2020

## Celebrate All Eight Nights of Hanukkah in Israel

Highlights include Shabbat in Jerusalem, High-tech in Tel Aviv, touring the beautiful Galilee and Golan, and floating in the Dead Sea. Potential extension to Petra, Jordan available (December 31–January 3).

For itinerary, registration, or questions, email [Lori@templeisaiah.org](mailto:Lori@templeisaiah.org) or call 301.317.1101.





# The MatzohBall 5k in

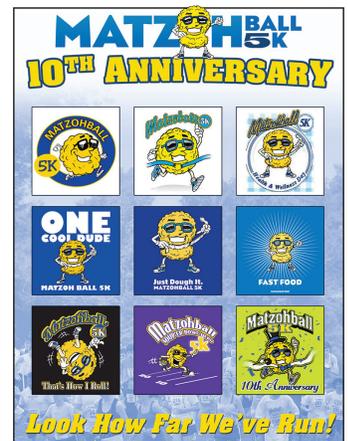


## How did the MatzohBall start?

In 2004, Lisa and Brian Jolles wanted to create an event that would strengthen TI's ties within the community, working to bring together the TI Men's Club as a team, and raise funds to support TI causes. Ben Sandler, Men's Club president at the time, rallied the troops. Ben and Jeff Kudisch served as Masters of Ceremonies for many years. The vision was that it would eventually be sustainable and give back to the Howard County community.

Members of the planning committee wanted a character that would be iconic, whimsical, and something that Jews and non-Jews alike could relate to. The original Matzohball Guy has continued to evolve and he even became a Bar Mitzvah in 2017! Over the years, we've had professional marketing help from Stan Potler and his son, Evan, Gerry and Margie Frank of Frank Strategic Marketing, Yale Bernstein, and for the past year, TI Communications Coordinator Raya Kridel; they have all helped us immensely with our marketing efforts.

This event has always required scores of Men's Club and other Temple members since its onset for support. As for the race itself, the original construction and infield set up at Centennial Park was managed by Cary Millstein, who was the only one of the early team with mechanical know-how! Cary thus earned the title of "head schlepper." About three years in, Brian created a Wellness Day to wrap around the run and further promote wellness for the broader community through the county schools and government. Barry Dubin then took the MatzohBall to another level with his project management skills, and we have utilized professional race management (Charm City Run) in order to help with logistics and race timing. There are countless TI members who have assisted over the years...too many to list! Men's Club members, their spouses, Sisterhood (Matzohbelles), SYTI, and the various clubs and organizations that make TI so great. Brian Groveman of Brian's Catering has always generously provided the fruit for the runners and lunch for the volunteers. And of course, there has been no greater supporter than our own Rabbi Axler, who promotes the event at every Friday night service, and participates with Rabbi Plotkin in the now infamous "Running of the Rabbis."



## What charities are involved, and when did this become a community event?

The Temple always had a strong relationship with DreamBuilders through Art and Marge Gold, and Ben and Amy Levitt. We added Hopeworks (Domestic Violence Center) and Grassroots within the past five years, when we realized that there were enough funds. To date, we have donated approximately \$45,000 to these charities, including \$1,200 designated to the Ellicott City Partnership in 2018, following the floods that damaged the area. The Temple's Financial Assistance Fund has been the largest recipient. Our records are meticulously maintained by Fred Berko, Men's Club treasurer. Of course, we couldn't do this without the generous support of both our corporate and family sponsors. Every donation counts, and they make a real difference in people's lives!

## What are the biggest challenges in planning the event every year?

It's a large undertaking, with 50+ volunteers to set up and coordinate two separate events (MatzohBall Run and Family Wellness Day) over such a large area. We have to work behind the scenes for months with Howard County Parks and Charm City Run to plan everything for Race Day. We truly

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# Howard County Jewish Federation Grows a New Arm: The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)

by Betsy Singer Marcus

The KKK and white supremacists marching in Charlottesville in August 2017 chanting "Jews will not replace us!" was grotesque and frightening. It was hard to believe in 2018 that this torch-lit parade of racists shouting antisemitic and racist slogans resulted in a young woman's death.

The events there really gave me pause. Later, I read about congregants at the city's only synagogue, Beth Israel Reform Congregation. They endured the sight of men wearing fatigues and armed with semiautomatic rifles passing them on Shabbat chanting "Sieg Heil."

I thought about our congregation and how frightening it would be for us to face a similar threat. I wasn't the only Jew in Howard County to ask, "What if white supremacists and KKK marchers targeted Columbia?" The Jewish Federation of Howard County's new Executive Director, Ralph Grunewald, suggested that David Bernstein, head of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), could help. We invited David to facilitate an informal focus group of Jews from various congregations to explore what they thought were the important issues we faced as a Jewish community.

Out of that meeting in August 2017 came the Howard County Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) to act as the Federation's community outreach and advocacy arm. Every congregation has a JCRC member, as does the HoCo Board of Rabbis. Members-at-large expand the reach of the group to special populations. Temple Isaiah members are Annie McCormick, Jeff Gold, Jeanie Lazerov, Lenore Schiff, and I serve as Chair.

JCRC's goal is to strengthen connections with community leaders and organizations — especially religious, social service, interfaith, government, and racial and ethnic organizations — to work together to advance common goals and to support each other in times of crisis.

All too soon, a crisis arose. Four seniors at Glenelg High School defaced their school building and sidewalks with hateful, racially charged, and antisemitic graffiti. The next morning, the Federation/JCRC stood in solidarity with faith leaders, elected officials, the County Executive and others at a press conference called by the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Superintendent to denounce the acts. Each of the students who were arrested faces up to three years in jail for hate crimes and destruction of property.

Several other incidents of bullying and harassment of Jewish students in county schools have come to our attention. We worked with parents and school officials to determine whether HCPSS policies are clear and students are fairly treated. We're also working with HCPSS to integrate anti-hate workshops and strengthen Holocaust education programs in middle schools.

The tragedy at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh last fall generated an outpouring of grief in our Jewish community. JCRC worked with the Board of Rabbis to hold an Interfaith Vigil of Mourning and Unity. The program, held at Beth Shalom two days later, overflowed with 1,400 people who grieved in solidarity with the Jewish community. We share newly-focused concerns about security at our places of worship and at public venues where we stage events. In response, we're planning a community-wide Safety and Security Conference with the Howard County Police Department.

We're partnering with the Courageous Conversations interfaith program designed to help bridge racial gaps in the community.

Our JCRC is a co-sponsor of Maryland Jewish Advocacy Day on February 20, in Annapolis. We're also meeting with local public officials to introduce JCRC, and are testifying on the HCPSS school budget.

JCRC will extend the reach of the Jewish community by developing a stronger voice around issues impacting our community. For more information, contact Betsy Singer at [betsysingermarcus@gmail.com](mailto:betsysingermarcus@gmail.com). ■



# Shir Isaiah

## Off the Clock



Shir Isaiah, the Temple Isaiah Adult Choir, has been in existence for more than 30 years. Members come from a variety of Jewish and musical backgrounds, but they share a love of singing, particularly Judaic music. Members were asked what musical genres and artists they enjoy listening to when they're "off the clock."



**Karen Allen, Alto** — I enjoy a variety of musical genres, in my pitch range so I can sing along! I like music from my youth, as well as crooners, a bit of jazz, and the blues. And I really love Yo-Yo Ma!



**Wendy Appleby, Soprano** — I love '70s music. I know the words to most songs! Gosh this is really showing my age — those are 40-year-old songs!



**Beth Buchalter, Alto** — I like to listen to classical music, Broadway show tunes, '70s and '80s pop and classic rock.



**Rich Burger, Bass** — Music for pleasure: '60s-'70s rock, Motown and old soul, prog rock, lots and lots of Jethro Tull, jazz and ragtime from the '20s and '30s, show tunes, and classical music, (especially partial to piano concertos and anything by Bach or Beethoven). I listen to just about anything except country and opera.



**Shari Chase, Alto** — I love '70s, Barbra Streisand, The Beach Boys, and Billy Joel. I also love Jimmy Buffet and Shabbat music.



**Jeff Dreifuss, Bass** — I like all music, especially folk, rock, jazz, and bluegrass.



**Susan Dreifuss, Alto** — I like folk, jazz, classic Broadway, and classic rock.



**Barbara Eldridge, Soprano** — My off-duty music preferences are '60s and '70s, or today's popular music; anything on the radio I can sing along with in the car.



**Luba Fineman, Alto** — I always listen to music in my spare time. I especially enjoy the music from the '50s through the '80s. I also like listening to classical and show tunes, and of course Jewish music.



**Elaine Firestone, Soprano** — In my “off duty” hours, the music I like listening to is disco, classical, and symphonic metal.



**Arlene Gillis, Soprano** — Broadway musicals, classical music, and the ‘60s, as that was my “era.” I’m a Simon & Garfunkel groupie.



**Ed Gillis, Tenor** — I like ‘60s and ‘70s music, and big symphonic classical.



**Jeff Gold, Bass** — Classic rock.



**Robyn Gold, Alto** — I like to listen to a very wide variety of music. My favorites include Broadway show tunes, and music from the ‘60s and ‘70s brings me back to my childhood; — for example, Motown and classic rock.



**Ruth Goldberg, Alto** — I love many genres of music; my favorite artists are: The Beatles, Billy Joel, Carole King, and (the soundtrack from) *Hamilton*.



**Ann Goldscher, Soprano** — I like to listen to oldies music and Broadway tunes.



**Diane Goodridge, Alto** — My favorite genres (can’t pick just one — sorry!): classic rock, Motown, ‘60s and ‘70s pop, and big band/swing/jazz.



**Marilyn Handwerger, Soprano** — I enjoy all kinds of music except big band: classical, bluegrass, reggae, pop (The Beatles’ “Imagine” is one of my favorites), and Cuban (The Buena Vista Social Club especially). But if I had to choose only one piece that I return to constantly, it is Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto In E Minor. It makes my heart sing.



**Liz Hertz, Alto** — I like to listen to Avriell and the Sequoias, Lady Gaga, NKOTB, Pentatonix, Billy Joel, Aerosmith, Simon & Garfunkel, and Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals.



**Ken Isman, Bass** — My favorites are country and classic rock. (This is a picture of me playing tuba with the University of Maryland Alumni Band, which I do every year at Homecoming.)



**Karen Johnson, Alto** — I love jazz, blues, gospel, cabaret, reggae, musical theater, and on the other end of the spectrum, soft spa music or harp melodies for quiet times.

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# Working Together to 'Teach Our Children Well'

by Alisha Rovner Blam  
and Amy Bree Becker

We understand that our fundamental responsibility as Jews is to repair the world, or engage in the practice of *tikkun olam*. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to teach our children to understand the value of caring for others. By teaching our children the value of good deeds, or *gemilut hasadim* (acts of lovingkindness), we improve the world now in the present, as well as for the future.

Children enrolled in Kulanu, Temple Isaiah's Religious School, learn from their first year how giving to the less fortunate, or engaging in the practice of *zedakah*, is an important Jewish value. Starting in the Threes year at Temple Isaiah Preschool, the students make *zedakah* boxes and bring *zedakah* donations weekly. In concert with the school and the synagogue as a whole, the Temple Isaiah Young Family Volunteer Committee seeks to go further to instill the importance of *tikkun olam* by engaging our children in organizing community activities that involve *gemilut hasadim*.

We believe it is important that our children view *ma'asim tovim* (good deeds) as a value that should be incorporated into their lives rather than something that is expected only as a mitzvah project when they are turning 12 or 13. We are all very busy and it can seem overwhelming to try to add one more thing to our lives. However, setting aside even a small amount of time to do these good deeds with our children is well worth the effort.

Age-appropriate activities allow children to engage in meaningful social action efforts to help others. With this in mind, Temple Isaiah's Young Family Volunteer committee has gotten off to a great start. With Rachel Petroff Kessler's assistance, a core group of volunteers formed the committee in early 2017.

Each month, one member of the committee takes a turn to suggest, organize, and lead an activity. Some of the projects the committee has organized over the last year include: running an Alex's Lemonade Stand to benefit pediatric cancer research, cooking dinner for the Grassroots shelter, making dog toys for an animal shelter, holding a book drive for the Maryland Book Bank, and collecting crayons for The Crayon Initiative.

Jessica Cade, a member of the committee said, "The Young Family Volunteer Committee's wide variety of activities are a great way for my 7-year-old daughter to participate in giving back to her greater community outside of her regular classroom."

Although this group is geared towards families with children of 3–10 years of age, all are welcome to join us. In fact, there are often older kids who attend the volunteer activities of the committee and end up helping out the younger children. Our group is low pressure, and there is no expectation that every family can attend every month. People show up when they are available, and we have always had enough people to get the job done.

Our children have fun being involved in community activities, and their active participation in these social action opportunities helps them become better people. We encourage all of our TI families to get involved in the Young Family Volunteer committee and its activities. Programs are announced in the TI newsletter, emails, and at school. Individuals may also contact Rachel Petroff Kessler at [Rachel@templeisiah.org](mailto:Rachel@templeisiah.org) for more information. ■

(Top to bottom: In October 2018, volunteers made fliers and placed boxes around TI to collect old crayons for The Crayon Initiative. The purpose of the program is to melt down old crayons and remanufacture them to distribute to pediatric hospitals. In September 2017, volunteers held an Alex's Lemonade Stand, where the kids made and sold the lemonade and counted the proceeds, earning \$102 for pediatric cancer research. In March 2017, volunteers sliced various fruits to provide a nutritious meal for people at the Grassroots shelter.



# Update: Kulanu

by Rabbi Daniel Plotkin

It has been a truly exciting first half of the year for Kulanu. Last summer, you read about all of the changes coming to what we once called our Religious School program, and it has been a truly amazing experience seeing all these changes take place.

In Bonim, our younger students have been engaged in the Hebrew Through Movement program, and our 3rd Grade students have enjoyed the new Cultural curriculum that their teachers, led by Dara Glenn, have created. Beresheet has just kicked off as a weekly program and the students are ready for it. Because of the later break time for Olim (4th–6th Grades), our younger Bonim students have taken advantage of the pizza sale, and enjoyed an early lunch before the bigger kids are released for break.

The big changes were in Olim; it was definitely a challenge getting it up and running in a way that our students (and teachers!) knew where to be and when, but after the first few weeks, everyone got into the flow. As the semester continued, we adjusted the Hebrew groups, making sure every student was in the best possible group for their own learning, and the results are beginning to show as the mid-year progress reports go out.

Due to some initial confusion, we renamed our second hour *Limmud*, which means “learning.” In Limmud, the students learn about 12 Jewish values and how to act on them at home and in school. In the second semester we will turn our Limmud sights to Jewish History and Heroes, highlighting different periods of Jewish History and the heroes who guided those eras. The heroes include our namesake, the prophet Isaiah, the fictional character Tevye the Milkman, Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of our Reform Movement in America, (who celebrates his 200th birthday this March!), and a modern Jewish Hero, the Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Stay tuned, there is lots of fun to come in Limmud.

Our Chavurah classes that kick off the second half of the day are running strong as well. The 4th Grade got to work with our Sacred Grounds Committee learning about how Temple Isaiah works to help the environment, and our 6th Grade worked with the Caring Committee to help understand how members of a synagogue community care for each other. The 5th Grade is just starting their Giving Circle program, learning how to make Jewish values-based choices in the distribution of *zedekah*.

Tefilah, the final period of the day, is also going well. Students are not only learning about the prayers of our service in a systematic way, but they get to experience *tefilah* on a regular basis with Rabbi Axler, Rachel Petroff Kessler, or myself leading them in prayer as we teach.

Perhaps the highlight of the Olim year was a trip to the Jewish Museum of Maryland in early January. There, students learned about the Jewish history of Baltimore, the Jewish roots and magic of Harry Houdini, and explored two 150-year-old synagogue buildings, all before a delicious lunch at Attman’s.

In the Geshher (7th Grade) program, we have done more to bring the two classes together than ever before. As the students spend the first hour learning about the background and events of the Holocaust, they are also learning about Israel in the second hour through interactive opportunities, mirroring the style of the Olim Limmud program. This will continue to evolve in the coming years as students will be entering Geshher with more Jewish knowledge, allowing their education to advance with them.

We have implemented a lot of changes in one year, so there will be nothing new for the 2019–20 school year. Just kidding! We have more in store as we evaluate and tweak our Bonim and Olim programs. Check future issues of *The Prophet Magazine* for exciting new announcements about our post B’nai Mitzvah (8th–12th Grade) program for next year. ■



# The Game of Life(long Learning)

by Rabbi Craig Axler, Rabbi Daniel Plotkin, Rachel Petroff Kessler, and Meredith Zuckerman

## ① Shalom, baby!

It is never too soon to start introducing little ones to the rich sensory experiences that Judaism has to offer — the glow of Shabbat candles, a whispered *Sh'ma* before bed, the smells of a holiday meal. All these and more will help anchor your children in a joyous home life filled with Jewish rituals.

- ⊙ Young ones thrive on routine. Our fun programs have predictable schedules and rituals so that your child can relax and know what comes next.
- ⊙ It is never too soon for little ones to start coming to Babies & Bagels, Munchkin Minyan, and Tot Shabbat — lap babies love snuggling with their parents while enjoying the music. Before you know it, they'll request "Bim Bam" at bedtime.

## ② Early Childhood Education

In early childhood education programs, educators engage with, observe, and listen to children in order to provide for all areas of the child's development: physical, cognitive, social, linguistic, emotional, and spiritual through an integrated approach to learning that is real, concrete, and relevant to each child. Young children need an atmosphere that is warm, nurturing, and accepting, that allows children to take risks and explore their world through play.

### Skills that develop in Preschool:

- ⊙ Using language to communicate with other children and adults
- ⊙ Developing problem-solving skills
- ⊙ Building fine and gross motor skills on the playground, in the sandbox, learning how to grasp and use crayons, markers, brushes, and other materials, etc.
- ⊙ Developing manipulative coordination through activities using lacing, stringing, small building, and other play materials
- ⊙ Fostering positive self-esteem
- ⊙ Feeling comfortable to express feelings and emotions

### Additional Benefits of a Jewish Preschool

- ⊙ Children feeling at home in the synagogue
- ⊙ Learning how to celebrate holidays
- ⊙ Developing a connection to Israel
- ⊙ Learning Hebrew prayers and songs
- ⊙ Learning *mitzvot* and thinking of God as a comforting force in their lives
- ⊙ Learning how to become a *mensch*



### ③ Elementary School

This is a time during which children grow in their Jewish knowledge, gain the ability to learn things on their own, and continue acquiring the skills needed to be informed members of the Jewish community, each in their own unique way.

- ⊙ Here, students build bonds of friendship that will follow them through the Kulanu program, and the rest of their lives.
- ⊙ Students learn using the Hebrew Through Movement strategy, allowing them to hear, respond to, and use Hebrew as a modern language.
- ⊙ Growing social needs are met through interactions within and across the older grades in Kulanu, including Club 23 and JYTI events after regular Kulanu hours.
- ⊙ More focus on their Hebrew decoding skills, building on previous years to create confident Hebrew readers in preparation for B'nai Mitzvah and beyond.

### ④ Teen Years

As children enter into adolescence, they engage in an intense period of identity formation. Who am I? What matters to me? How can I matter? Our programming for teens is designed to give them a space to begin grappling with these questions, all while building meaningful relationships with peers and mentors, and acquiring the Jewish knowledge and skills to carry into adult life.

- ⊙ The Next Dor program puts teens in the driver's seat, able to customize their learning experience and choose the topics and projects they are most interested in.
- ⊙ Teens crave independence and the chance to be "in charge." Our *madrichim* enjoy having their teachers relying on them, and younger students look up to them as role models. Youth group leaders create programming for their peers, with an advisor to provide guidance when needed.
- ⊙ A recent study of alumni of NFTY and other URJ youth programs found that program alumni were 3x as likely as their Jewish peers to say that "being part of a Jewish community" is essential. Additionally, 89% of alumni provide their children with a Reform Jewish education, compared to only 39% of their peers (<https://tinyurl.com/URJYouthStudy>).
- ⊙ After conversations with many of our teens and parents, as well as leading practitioners across the country, we're preparing to make some big changes to our teen program. Details coming this spring.

### ⑤ Adult Education

The fun of Jewish learning definitely isn't limited to the young! Adult Education at TI includes weekly Torah study; periodic lunch and learn sessions; one-shot and multi-session classes; weekends each year with special guests: artists, musicians, and scholars-in-residence. Keep your eyes out for the results of our recent TI2020 Adult Education survey. (For more on Adult Ed, read about our Adult B'nai Mitzvah class, pages 12–13.) ■



# Embracing Torah

## Adult Education and Becoming a B'nai Mitzvah

by Jan Morse, Mauria Shulman,  
and Michelle Stulberger

*In June 2018, fifteen members of Temple Isaiah completed a course of study toward becoming b'nai mitzvah and were part of a joint ceremony. Here are a few of their stories.*

I grew up in a small, conservative synagogue in Oak Ridge, TN. At that time, there were no women on the bimah, and there were no bat mitzvahs for girls.

The first time I held a Torah, I was in my early 50's. I was at a community Rosh Hashanah service in Washington, DC. Rather than walk around the congregation with the Torah to begin Torah service, the custom there was to pass it through the congregation, so everyone had a turn to hold it. As the Torah neared me, I could hear myself think "This isn't done!" But when the Torah was handed to me, I took a deep breath and, for some reason, began to cry.

A little more than two years ago, my husband David and I joined Temple Isaiah. Last fall when an adult b'nai mitzvah class was announced, I signed up. I knew that I wanted to read the Torah.

Over the past months, our class studied the history, meaning, and order of prayers in Jewish liturgy with Rachel Petroff Kessler. With Rabbi Plotkin, we learned the structure of the Torah, and themes of each of its books. With Rabbi Axler, we focused on *Chukat*, the *parsha* that we read this week, and saw it through the lens of centuries of commentary.

When I got my Torah assignment, two verses from Chapter 20 of *Chukat*, I was more than a little anxious about reading it. My Hebrew, to put it charitably, was rusty. Ah, but there is the internet, *Baruch HaShem*. You can find websites for brushing up on basic Hebrew, sites where you can see the Torah text with and without vowels, and as it appears in the scroll, sites where you can hear it read or chanted, slowly, or fast, by women and by men. As I practiced, I began to feel a bit of confidence.

A couple of weeks before the ceremony, we had our first run through of the Torah reading. I waited my turn, thinking, "Ok, so NOW I'm nervous." When I got to the scroll, Rabbi Plotkin showed me where to start and handed me the pointer. The words swam together a little bit at first, but I took a deep breath, and began to read. When I finished, it felt like quite an achievement.

But the next day, I began to feel like I had done something more than just read. I had had a close up encounter with Torah, this beautiful scroll, this ancient, sacred text that is the core of Judaism: the text that, as Rabbi Axler says, teaches us how to live Jewishly.

Reading from the Torah connected me to our story. It made me feel a part of a long and rich tradition, and it gave me an experience of being Jewish that I had not had before.

My sister Libby has two very wise children: Isaac, who is 24, and Vivien, who is 21. When Ike was 13, I asked him how he felt about his bar mitzvah. "Aunt Jane," he said solemnly, "it's a really big deal."

And a few months ago, when I asked Vivien about her bat mitzvah, she told me "it was a lot of work, but when I put on my tallit, that's when I knew it was real."

They were both right. So here I am, a little bit transformed.

With great joy and great pride, I became a bat mitzvah.

— Jan Morse



I was thrilled to have the opportunity to take the Adult B'nai Mitzvah class at Temple Isaiah. As someone who chose Judaism and is raising Jewish children, it was important to me to continue my own education and continue to engage in my community here at Temple Isaiah, as well as the larger Jewish community. One thing that surprised me was how emotional I felt on the actual day of our ceremony! My conversion was a private moment in the mikvah, but this felt like a declaration of my commitment in front of those who knew me and those who didn't, but who were still equally excited to share in my milestone. Next up: learning Hebrew so I can continue keeping up with the kids!

— Michelle Stulberger

I joined Temple Isaiah in the fall of 2017 and in the winter of 2018, the B'nai Mitzvah class formed. Over six months, as a group we studied, worked, played, planned, worried, worked some more, and then happily graduated with a multi-person B'nai Mitzvah and PARTY to go with it! Here are some highlights of what the course gave us: The B'nai Mitzvah class gave us Jewish history. With Rachel Petroff Kessler, we learned of the development of the Jewish prayer services over millennia. We learned the significance of whole sections of prayers, when to bow, and what it means to do so. Rabbi Plotkin led us into the famous discussions and debates around the meaning of Torah. Then, with large sheaves of paper and with pens in hand, we took our turns writing our opinions about selected Torah passages. In traditional Torah fashion, we wrapped our own responses around those of other class members, creating a beautiful coil of many hands writing on one page. When we finally got to meet the Torah scrolls, Rabbi Axler was there to encourage us with his love of Torah. We held the scrolls, and we unrolled them. We looked at them, closely, variations and all! We became aware of each Torah as a living text. Rabbi Axler noted that 'Black Fire on White Fire' is one name by which Torah is called. The power of that image is an apt one. Torah drew us in. More than half of the class volunteered to learn Hebrew and read from the Torah on the bimah, for our B'nai Mitzvah. Throughout the class, all the challenging, creative work that was involved, and all the socializing that went with it, the B'nai Mitzvah class prepared us to participate in the many *mitzvot* that Temple Isaiah offers. We attend services regularly. We sing with Shir Isaiah. We volunteer and serve on the committees that are essential to Temple life. Performing such *mitzvot*, we give back for the blessings we receive here, and our lives expand and are enriched.

— Mauria Shulman





# Mah Jong in China and Throughout Jewish Culture (Part 2 of 2)

by Doug Silverstein

## Appeal of Mah Jong in Jewish Culture

In an online article for radio station WBEZ (91.5 FM) in Chicago, Robin Amer "How Mah Jong became American (and Jewish)" stated: "I have faint memories of the green, felt-covered card table, neat racks lined up along its edges, and in the center, a pile of smooth tiles whose purpose was a mystery to me." Similar memories and sentiments were expressed by our friends at Temple Isaiah (TI). Marion Miller recalled: "My mother played Mah Jong while I was growing up. I remember as late as high school watching her and her group play Mah Jong. The people she played with were lifelong friends of hers. I remember listening to the click of the tiles, the women moving the tiles about very confidently. When I do play Mah Jong, I feel as if I'm channeling my mother." In an article entitled "A Mah Jong Renaissance Among Jewish American Women" by Debra Nussbaum Cohen in *Haaretz* in 2013, Ms. Nussbaum Cohen conveys the story of an elderly woman who had played the game for many decades but moved away from her community. Her granddaughter (Elissa Meth Kestin) decided to learn the game herself, in part to be able to play with her grandmother, but also in an effort to recapture fond memories of her grandmother playing with her friends. Over time, she taught hundreds of people at Jewish centers in Manhattan. Sharon Nussbaum of TI has similar memories: "My mother played when I was young. I remember them playing and how they served M & Ms, raisins, and potato chips. To this day, I still like the salty, chocolate, and raisins together. But, I did not play with my mother until near the end of her life. One Thanksgiving, I played with her and my sister-in-law. I did buy my mother a Mah Jong set one Hanukkah. I keep looking for opportunities to play with my daughter, but we can never find the time."

The inheritance of a family Mah Jong set can be a wonderful tradition. Robin Amer stated: "Grandma Flo owned her own Mah Jong set. My parents inherited it, but gave the set to friends. Their friends gave the set back when they learned my mother was taking lessons last year." Robyn Gold of TI recalled: "I got into it [Mah Jong] because of my mom, and also because it is a classic — one of things that you have to learn. I asked my mom, and she gave me her set, which she got when she was about 20 years old." Marion Miller regrets not being able to play with her mother's set: "When my mother passed away, my father offered me her Mah Jong set and I laughed and said I would never play. I regret that decision now."

Annelise Heinz told Ms. Nussbaum Cohen for *Haaretz* that there is clear evidence of a "Mah Jong renaissance" today. In fact, one Museum of Jewish Heritage exhibit attracted groups of women who would play games in the museum gallery. Melissa Martens Yaverbaum stated to Nussbaum Cohen: "Sometimes Chinese visitors would come, too. I can't think of anything else that is transnational in that way." Meth Kestin adds: "[People] have seen the game played by mothers and grandmothers and saw how much fun they had, and inherited their sets [of tiles]. They want to recreate those great feelings and feel close to their mother and grandmother. Mah Jong remains a really powerful tool for building community." Heinz adds, "What's interesting is how Mah Jong helped connect various geographic regions of these new, strongly Jewish communities with each other as part of the connective tissue of postwar Jewish culture," Heinz said.

Many of our friends at TI have also become avid devotees to playing Mah Jong. Fryda Fraeme, who plays on Friday afternoons at TI, stated: "A lot of times we

have the same eight to nine people and have two tables. It's part of sisterhood and we sign up through SignUp Genius. There are people who have played for a long time and some who just started playing. We're all friends who want to have a nice afternoon and play."



*From left to right: Fryda Fraeme, Marion Miller, Jeanie Lazarov, Donna Levinson. Photo courtesy of Fryda Fraeme.*

Marion Miller also plays on Friday afternoons at TI. In addition to Fridays, many in our community have developed separate groups that play during the week. Fryda Fraeme cited the camaraderie, friendship, and cognitive advantages of playing Mah Jong. She said, "I also have a Wednesday game with my girlfriends. It's a little bit of a brainteaser — you have to give some thought to it and can be challenging." Marion Miller added: "We have gone through a lot of life's highs and lows together. We share and support. So, I like the emotional support and friendship as well as the fun of playing the game." Robyn Gold agreed: "We laugh, forget whose turn it is, because we're talking. We've developed a great rapport. We have to have food — grazing food. We also have birthday themes for the month in which someone has a birthday." Interestingly, while some experience long intervals, even years, in between playing a Mah Jong game, the draw to resurrect the game seems strong. Both Robyn Gold and Fryda Fraeme rediscovered the game after long absences. Robyn recalled: "I stopped playing for about ten years. Then, my life changed, I retired and had more time, and, I always wanted to start playing again." Fryda also played when her children were younger but then stopped playing until she moved to Columbia.

For some players, their inner competitive nature is fueled by playing the game. Sharon Nussbaum stated: "I love that I do not need to depend on a partner (like in bridge), but only need to depend on me as I am very competitive. [But], there is also a lot of socialization. When we started, we would put some money aside from the games and go on weekends to western Maryland and play, go shopping, and eat out. The husbands stayed home and took care of the kids while we were away." While Sharon

Nussbaum plays in a weekly game, she also attends Mah Jong tournaments in Atlantic City and other venues. She said that most who attend are Jewish, but there are also Italian women, men, and people of other backgrounds. To attend a tournament, one must pay a fee that covers gaming

and food. "Everyone is initially assigned a table and you play four games (about an hour). There may be five to six rounds, with new people at your table during each round. A score is kept based on the hand you get for each game." Sharon Nussbaum mentioned that TI had a Mah Jong tournament in June 2018 that "was fabulous." TI is planning on hosting a small, low-key Sisterhood tournament in March 2019 and another big fundraiser in June 2019. Yet there are many others, such as Robyn Gold, Fryda Fraeme, and Marion Miller who have developed significant skills and play for some money, but who prefer a more relaxed atmosphere.

For many reasons, Mah Jong seems to appeal most to those who have already settled down in communities with families. The appeal to the younger generations of our TI community is mixed. While Robyn Gold, Marion Miller, and Fryda Fraeme have encouraged their children to play, thus far the interest seems tepid. But Marion Miller cautions: "I used to think that Mah Jong was a game that only the older generation played. I'm seeing now that younger people are playing. It's a game for everyone."

### How to Play the Chinese Version

The Chinese game generally requires four players and includes a set of 144 tiles that vary in their appearance and meaning. The tiles display classic Chinese characters and symbols, including numbers, flowers, bamboo, and animals, all that have specific ties to Chinese culture. While the game can be simplified to a rendering of bridge, the incorporation of many cultural aspects contributes to the deep connection the Chinese have with the game.

Each round of the game begins with a shuffling (mixing) of the tiles, with each player

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## Remembering Our *Past* Celebrating Our *Future*

The 50th Anniversary Committee is still looking for your Temple Isaiah photos and memorabilia!

You can drop them at the TI office for scanning, or email digital files to Arlene & Ed Gillis at [arlenebg1@verizon.net](mailto:arlenebg1@verizon.net).

by Meredith Zuckerman

# Update: TI Preschool

"I made a donut!" "Look, we made an airport with a shopping mall!" "The baby is taking a nap." "Let's play a game together. You wait here and I'm going to cook you a surprise." These are just a few tidbits of what I hear every day as I walk through the halls at Temple Isaiah Preschool.

The classrooms are filled with wonder, joy, and curiosity. Our teachers work with the children on their journey to develop their creativity, social skills, foster new friendships, and solve problems. Each child can explore the world around them in a safe, nurturing environment.

When I started in June, I received positive feedback about our program, but was continually asked questions regarding the hours we offer. Our preschool community is evolving, with more families who need extended hours in order to meet their needs.

Temple Isaiah's Preschool Committee met to determine which hours would best accommodate our growing community. After discussions with current preschool families and teachers, Temple Isaiah members, and evaluating other preschools in the area, we decided that the new and expanded hours options would include as early as 8am for before-care and as late as 5pm for after-care.

Early-bird registration for next year began on January 7, which sparked praise and excitement for next year's new and expanded options. We look forward to another wonderful year of learning, growing, and having fun!

If you would like to visit us in person, or if you have any questions, please call the preschool at 301.498.4242 or email me at [Meredith@templeisayah.org](mailto:Meredith@templeisayah.org). ■



ultimately receiving 13 tiles. Each match features several rounds in which players attempt to form groups (melds or sets) of tiles together, in a similar fashion to bridge. The groups may include exact matches (e.g., three tiles with five bamboo shoots), or, sequences (e.g., numbers on tiles ranging from 3 to 5). Players successively select and discard tiles to achieve the required number of four melds with three tiles per meld, plus, a final (fifth) meld that includes only two tiles. Pieces can be obtained from a general pool of tiles in the middle of the table, or, occasionally from another player. Players are free to form whichever groups they prefer. These general rules contain some modifications according to the version being played. For example, the version called "Old Hong Kong Mah Jong" is played with the rules outlined above but with some variation. It is a rather simplified version of the game as the rules and scoring system are comparatively straightforward.

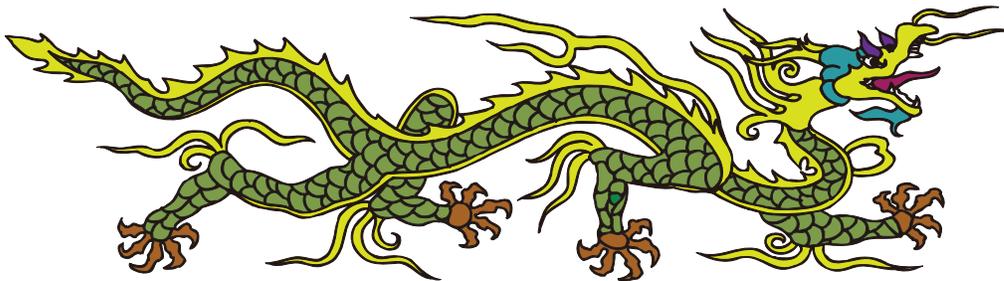
### How to Play the Jewish Version

The Jewish version of Mah Jong differs from the Chinese form in some respects. The Jewish version includes 152 (versus 144 in the Chinese version) tiles in which the players construct groups of tiles together as matches or sequences, similar to the Chinese version. Sharon Nussbaum pointed out that there are some minor differences in the symbols depicted on the tiles, with more flowers and

the inclusion of eight jokers in the Jewish version. Additionally, unlike the Chinese format that allows players to select their melds or sets as they choose, the Jewish version only allows certain sets to be formed, based on cards published and sold by the NJML (National Mah Jong League) that contain a list of allowable sets (and points that can be earned) that can be formed in a game. While the card lists many sets, the options are limited compared to the Chinese version. The list changes each year, requiring re-learning of the available options.

### A Personal Note

My personal connection with Mah Jong is playing the Chinese version of the game. While I find the game itself an enjoyable experience, I learned a lot about the Chinese culture by playing the game. This was essential since I married into a Chinese family. Playing with relatives helped me quickly and substantively connect with them. The stories told while playing were certainly valuable, but the opportunity to observe the interactions among them were also precious. From reading about the experiences of Jewish women, and talking with a few, I discovered that the association of all players with the game is based on a shared desire to have fun while bonding with others and sharing history. In many ways, playing Mah Jong is a way of making our own history, one tile at a time. ■



*In the Next Issue...*

- \* TI's 50th Anniversary Event Schedule
- \* Sacred Grounds
- \* TI's Youth Chorus
- \* Reform Movement, Then and Now

# Bits & Pieces

## Welcome

*New Members!*

Adam Greenstein & Andria Snyder  
Hilton & Lynda Gluck

## זוהר אשכול

with Doris Geisler

**Redn iz silver un shvaign iz gold.**

רעדן איז זילבער און שווייגן איז גאלד

**To talk is silver but to shut up is gold.**

The value of silence is something we don't acknowledge much in this over-stimulated, hyper-connected world. It has a secondary meaning, which is actually taken to be the primary one today — 'There are things best left unsaid.' There is value in just letting things go and not making a comment.

A wise man of ancient times expressed it concisely: "For everything its season, and for every activity under heaven its time: . . . a time for silence and a time for speech." — (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7)

Or to use a familiar quote: 'Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.'

## Who's Who @ Temple Isaiah



Name: Josh Putterman

Family: My wife, Deana, my two children, Evan (13) and Shayna (11). We have a 7-year-old beagle mix (Layne).

Hometown: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Something You Might Not Know About Me: I went to college to be an athletic trainer, but decided I didn't want to travel. Instead, I went to work for Marriott and have been with them for 23 years.

Position at Temple Isaiah: Financial Vice President, Board of Trustees

I've Been a Member Here Since: 2008

People Can Come to Me If They Need: I am approachable about pretty much anything. If I don't have the answer or know, it is a great way to learn something new.

Why I love being at TI: Temple Isaiah has given me a place to belong and grow. I have met so many wonderful people throughout my ten years here, many of whom have become my closest friends. TI has that family feeling, where you can come in and know there is someone you will run into that you may not have seen in awhile, or had a long conversation with yesterday. ■

...continued from page 7



**Frani Klein, Alto** — I love show music, Debbie Friedman, and pop music from the '70s and '80s.



**Beth Millstein, Alto** — Jazz and classic rock mostly, plus any a cappella music. Pentatonix, Earth Wind and Fire, Deanna Bogart, and musicals/show tunes of course!



**Rachel Millstein, Alto** — I usually listen to alternative bands like Walk the Moon, Marian Hill, Fitz and the Tantrums, and Twenty One Pilots.



**Jill Nagiel, Alto** — I love listening to musicals and singing along to Imagine Dragons with my kids.



**Cathie Perolman, Alto** — I like listening to: folk, jazz, Broadway, classical, and blues.



**Gary Perolman, Tenor** — I like to listen to a variety of music: folk, rock, jazz, blues, and Broadway.



**Fern Reitman, Soprano** — I love to listen to music especially when I am cleaning, cooking and/or baking and I play it loud!! As of late, I enjoy listening to Michael Buble, Eva Cassidy, Andrew Lloyd Webber love songs, Elton John, Carole King, James Taylor, Kristin Chenoweth, Andrea Bocelli, and Vivaldi, *The Four Seasons*. Basically a range of music from popular, folk, show, and light classical. It's all good. Oh, the top of my list is our very own Shir Isaiiah CD, "From Then to Tomorrow!"



**Jen Schwartz, Soprano** — My musical tastes are eclectic, and run the gamut from the Beatles and Paul Simon, to '80s and '90s alternative, to Copland and Tchaikovsky, to Lin Manuel Miranda, to Ed Sheeran and Katy Perry.



**Rick Slavkin, Tenor** — I like Top 40 music (light rock); Josh Groban is one of my favorites.



**Marty Wasserman, Bass** — When listening to music, I will generally turn to classical, enjoying Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Mahler. ■

...continued from page 4

appreciate our "regulars" who have been helping consistently since the beginning, and we're always looking for others who would like to help out. The weather is always a factor that we can't control, including two or three impending hurricanes or torrential storms, but we've always managed to work around it. There have been times when the attendance was so large that we had to lock the gates! We've had slick pathways, which are responsible for naming sections of the course such as Fred's Folly and Masada. Luckily, we've had very few casualties, and always have doctors (and dentists) on our team.

### How has the race benefited the TI community over the years?

Most importantly, it's been a project that has brought the Temple together in community outreach, truly in keeping with the spirit of *tikkun olam*. Over the past 14 years, more than \$165,000 has gone to support many of the Temple's needs, including financial support for those in need, social action programs, and many other worthy causes.

**This year's 15th Annual MatzohBall 5K and 1 Mile Family Fun Run will be on Sunday, June 2. Visit**

[www.matzohballrun.com](http://www.matzohballrun.com)

**for details, and keep your eyes out for announcements on how you can help out!**



Temple Isaiah  
12200 Scaggsville Rd.  
Fulton, MD 20759



## Temple Isaiah Board of Trustees 2018–19

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## Wanted: talented writers!

If you have a way with words and a knack for telling great stories, *The Prophet Magazine* could use your skills.

We're looking for "reporters" to:

- + interview long-time members about their lives and Temple Isaiah's history
- + write great stories about ways that members connect with each other
- + profile TI staff and board members
- + write stories about Jewish practice and some of the ways to get involved and care for the world

Interested? Email  
[Raya@templeisaiah.org](mailto:Raya@templeisaiah.org)  
with your story ideas and  
she'll put you to work!

