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Letter from the Rabbi

When you see Mandy Van Ostran approaching you before a Shabbat service, do you avert your eyes, hoping that she will ask someone else to participate in the Torah service? Does the idea of having an aliyah, or lifting or dressing the Torah, or carrying the Torah around the sanctuary make you very, very nervous?

Or are you happy enough to take on one of these roles, but unclear about the real meaning of what you are doing?

Or are you worried about having an aliyah or other honor at your child or grandchild's upcoming bar or bat mitzvah?

Help is at hand! Back by popular demand, I will be offering a workshop on Sunday, January 21st at 1:15 p.m. to address both the ideas and the practice behind our Torah service. Among the topics to be covered are

- What is the significance of the songs that we sing during the Torah service (and what does the Reform service leave out, and why)?
- What do the words of the blessings of the aliyah mean?
- Is it ok to read rather than chant the aliyah?
- When do we stand and when do we sit, and why?
- How do you lift the Torah? (There is a technique that makes it easier than you would think.)
- How do you best take the Torah out of the ark and return it to the ark?
- When do you leave the bimah to carry the Torah through the congregation, and what do you do when you get back to the bimah?
- How do you get the belt on the Torah? Which way does it fasten? (We will practice with both the regular and the High Holy Day belts.)
- What other responsibilities does the person who dresses the Torah have on the bimah?

- What is the etiquette for opening and closing the ark? Where to stand and what to do.
- For all roles: when do you come up and when do you go back to your seat?
- Any questions YOU might have.

Bring a cell phone or other recording device if you would like to record the chanting or reading of the blessings of the aliyah. And prepare to have fun getting practice in a non-judgmental and supportive group. The workshop is open to members age 13 or older. All are encouraged to attend, even if only to watch, listen, and learn. Make a resolution this secular New Year to become more comfortable on the bimah in at least one role!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Barbara L. Block

Letter from the President

While preparing the menorah before the last evening of Hanukah I decided to use all the misfits. I suspect you have them, partial boxes of candles left at the end of the holiday, unused because you bought new candles the next year. Maybe you've got a Frankenstein box of combined leftovers (guilty). After I lit the faded, bent, broken and forgotten candles they lasted surprisingly long and burned especially bright. I imagined they were enthusiastic because they were finally being employed for their purpose.

When I sustained neuro-muscular damage three years ago I felt kind of like one of those candles. I couldn't work, my future was uncertain while waiting to discover whether the damage was permanent (it was), and I was pretty depressed. But after I began getting around with a walker, then a cane, I learned that if I did one productive thing every day I felt better. I would park a chair in front of the refrigerator and clean out the science projects. I would vacuum the

living room. Everything took too long, but since I had so much time on my hands I also learned to be patient with myself and remember that there was no hurry. That slow climb to where I am now started somewhere inside me when I decided that I wasn't going to take my affliction lying down.

I will never dance the way I once did, nor wear high heels. No more skiing, stairs are very tricky, and I now feel guilty whenever I have to mount a stepstool to reach something after my last fall. But I am alive, generally happy, mobile enough to run most errands, and most importantly I have a sense of purpose in many areas of my life.

Thank you, Temple Israel, for being one of those purposes. Whatever lies ahead in 2018, your Board of Directors all feel that sense of purpose, whatever their purview or perspective. As we begin Temple Israel's 125th year in Springfield, I hope you all join us in celebrating our place here in the Ozarks and ongoing dedication to keeping a Jewish presence alive here in southwest Missouri.

June Weiss