

From the June/July issue of *Temple Talk*

## **Letter from the Rabbi**

Twelve years ago, at the end of June, I left the United States for Israel to begin my study to become a rabbi. Seven years ago, on the first Shabbat of June, I was ordained a rabbi.

What a journey this has been! Before I began rabbinical school, I was active as a lay leader. I led worship and shiva services in my rabbi's absence, I taught both children and adults, and spoke to interfaith groups. But I wanted to know more, and I wanted to make these activities the center of my life, rather than something I did when my day job permitted.

I can now look back on eleven years of serving congregations, beginning with my student pulpits. At first, all my relationships with congregants were new ones. I loved working with them but missed the depth of my long-standing friendships in my home congregation in Minnesota.

Recently, I had the pleasure of hearing from a man who had been my confirmation student in a student pulpit. We have known each other since 2007, and he has grown into a wonderful adult. How sweet it was that he reached out to me to tell me about the positive influence I had had in his life!

Student rabbis come and go, and the ties we form with congregants, while important, tend to be fleeting. I so appreciate being a resident rabbi and forming the deeper and longer-term relationships that this allows. And now, at the end of three years at Temple Israel, I am gratified to realize that we have some history together. I remember congregants who are no longer here. I recognize the young adults who return home from college, and they recognize me. I marvel at how those whom I taught in Religious School are now high school students helping out in our classrooms. I thrill to see how the elementary kids who ran with abandon around in our lobby have grown to stand as mature b'nei mitzvah, leading the service, reading from the Torah and sharing their wisdom with us. And I get to see babies whom I have named begin Jewish study in our Religious School.

I have also seen our Temple Board grow and develop. I am grateful to all

who have stepped forward during these years to lead our congregation, most especially to Richard Schur, president when I arrived; to Ray Weiner, president for the past two years, and now to June Weiss, our new president. My initial contract with the congregation ends this June, and I am grateful to the Board for renewing my contract. I look forward to many more years of deepening our relationships and strengthening our knowledge and practice of Judaism!

As I mentioned at the beginning of this column, the first Shabbat in June will mark the seventh anniversary of my ordination. I would like to share this occasion with you at our Shabbat morning service on June 3<sup>rd</sup> by providing some special desserts at our potluck lunch.

With a full heart,

I wish you Shalom,

**Rabbi Barbara L. Block**

## **Letter from the President**

In early 1986 Rabbi Steven A Fox<sup>1</sup> was a guest instructor in a class I was taking when he gave me an “Aha!” moment. He said that Judaism is the only major religion that seeks to sanctify time. Then he went on to elaborate that the meaning of the word sanctify is to set apart and make holy. Other religions sanctify people such as their prophets and leaders whose teachings they study, or geographical locations to which they make difficult pilgrimages. Although we revere both our sacred writings and our sacred places, it is the times we set aside to as holy that help us connect to Jews everywhere. Our people’s history has been nomadic and scattered, causing some early disputes as to when a new moon occurred, so the sage Hillel II (4th century CE) calculated the details of the Jewish calendar and today Jewish people around the world follow his system. The unity of the Jewish calendar is a remarkable expression of the unity of the Jewish people. Rabbi Fox also pointed out that Adonai, with infinite wisdom, understood that we needed time to disconnect from the things occupying our attention throughout the week. In order to refresh our minds, it’s also important to connect with family and community and help us remember why we live, not just why we work or go to school or do any of the innumerable things we do throughout the week.

There, in the basement of a borrowed church building, I understood Shabbat in a way I never had before. Even before our wedding we began to treat it as sacred, avoiding scheduling anything to conflict with family time. I can’t say I’ve maintained that same degree of devotion at all times over the years, but that lesson has come back to me time and time again with regard to my family and always making time for them.

Today most people find it increasingly difficult to segregate parts of their lives from others. They overlap due to our constant accessibility by way of our devices, despite all of the conveniences that came with them. Several years ago, I had a second “Aha!” moment, but this one came with a great deal of embarrassment. While sitting with the choir on the bima, in the middle of a bat mitzvah, my old flip-phone began ringing because I forgot to turn it off before services began. Worse, it was at a quiet moment just before her Torah reading began and my

ring tone at the time was the Addams Family TV show theme. That was the last time I forgot to turn off my ringer before entering schul.

My most recent “Aha!” moment came when I hosted a bonfire and s’mores for my son and a group of his friends in our back yard. It broke my heart to walk out my back door and see a bunch of young faces ringed around a blazing bonfire, all illuminated by their cell phone and tablet screens. When I was in my 20s, a bonfire with friends meant lots of laughter and story-telling, usually at least one guitar coming out to play, and more often than not some form of alcohol. But we connected, we interacted, and we made memories that are still with us.

After that bonfire I made the decision to fast from social media every Shabbat. I don’t become a hermit, if the phone rings I pick it up or if I become aware of a text message I’ll respond. But I don’t go on social media, I don’t play games, and I even avoid watching my recording of Rachel Maddow’s Friday show until Saturday evening. I do have conversations and interact with people, which have made me feel more connected. Another thing our nomadic ancestors taught us was to carry things of value with you, and my memories and personal connections are always with me even if my photos are not. Please remember, this summer and always, to make more memories than selfies and to cherish the people in your life. It’s part of your heritage as a Jew.

**June Weiss**

President, Temple Israel