



Congregation Beth Mordecai

A Jewish Home for the Soul

December 2015

Kislev/Tevet 5776

Hanukkah Party!

Sunday, December 6 - 3pm

The Greeks vs. the Maccabees!

Celebrate Hanukkah with a fun-filled, spirited trivia competition pitting members against each other as Greeks and Maccabees! (Costumes welcome!)

We will also have latkes, Hanukkah songs and Israeli dance and a beautiful candle-lighting ceremony.

RSVP today on our [Facebook Event Page](#) or email Rabbi Saks (ari.saks@gmail.com) .



Beth Mordecai's Virtual Hanukkah

Wednesday, December 9

Take a photo of you and/or your family lighting the candles on the 4th night of Hanukkah. Then, share your photo with a message on our [Facebook page](#) or email it to Rabbi Saks (ari.saks@gmail.com).

(We encourage funny & creative!)

A video collage will be made with all the photos and messages and placed on our Facebook page and our January bulletin!



Now through December 6

YJPA is collecting non-perishable food items to donate to the pantry at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Perth Amboy.

Drop off donations when the shul is open - there is a bin just outside Safran Hall.

For pick-ups after hours, please email YJPerthAmboy@gmail.com.

Chinese Dinner & a Movie at the Rabbi's House

December 24 - 7pm

Join the Beth Mordecai community for our annual Chinese Dinner & a Movie night at the Rabbi's house!

On our Facebook page you will be able to vote on your preferred movie. This year's choices are: [Annie Hall](#), [Frisco Kid](#), [Zero Motivation](#) (read each movie's plot summary by clicking on the title).

RSVP by December 20 to Rabbi Saks (ari.saks@gmail.com).





Congregation Beth Mordecai

Established 1897

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Office E-mail OfficeBethMordecai@gmail.com
Rabbi's E-mail Ari.Saks@gmail.com
Office Hours 10am - 2pm Monday - Thursday
Website http://BethMordecai.org

Synagogue Staff

Rabbi Ari Saks
Executive Director Elliot Rubin

Board of Trustees

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Trustee Steve Safran
Trustee Louis Sher

Committee Contacts

Caring	Sherry Weber	908.451.9708
Duck Race	Alan Roy	908.403.4303
High Holidays	Marc Fertik	732.390.3348
	David Bennett	732.494.9029
Oneg/Kiddush	Betty Fertik	732.407.0821
	Jeremy Strauss	732.331.4049
Strategic Planning	Marc Fertik	732.390.3348
YJPA	Stella Morrison	



Acknowledge the Occasion through Beth Mordecai

"Tzedaka is equal in importance to all other commandments combined."
-Talmud

**I am pleased to make a contribution of \$ _____
to the following fund...**

☐ **Rabbi's Discretionary Fund**

Allows the rabbi to support special programs and individuals in need.

☐ **General Fund**

Applied to the operating budget of the congregation.

☐ **Friday Night Oneg Fund**

Used for cookies and other noshes following Friday night services.
A contribution of \$75 supports one oneg.

☐ **Shabbat Morning Kiddush Fund**

Used for luncheons and noshes following Saturday morning services.
A contribution of \$125 supports one Kiddush.

...in honor, memory or appreciation of:

My Information:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

**Please send this contribution form and check directly to the synagogue office.
Checks should be made payable to "Congregation Beth Mordecai".**



**Contributions to the above listed funds may
also be made on the synagogue website
through our secure PayPal link.**

*Thank you for your generous and thoughtful support of our funds
which keep the synagogue running & help with a multitude of worthy
projects that enrich & invigorate our community.*

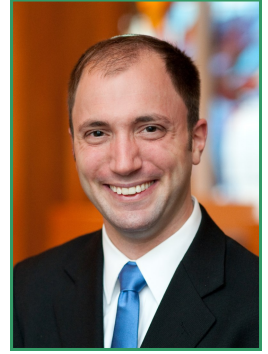
Todah Rabbah - many thanks to you all!

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund Donations

Rhona & Fred Bernhardt
Louise & Alan Siegel
Norma Witkin
Charlie Zammit



Torah & Temple: Symbolizing our Issues with Religion



Dear Hevreh,

Picture in your mind the moment that the curtains in front of our beautiful ark are opened. Or, if you are of a certain generation, remember the time in which the little white button was pressed to cause the powerful wooden doors to slowly open. It's a moment of the greatest grandeur, a spectacular sight as the covers and doors reveal our most holy Jewish object - the Torah - standing regally upon the ark's platforms. It's a sight that's designed to intimate the experience of the Jewish people witnessing the opening of the *kodesh hakodashim*, the holy of holies, in the times when the Temple stood in Jerusalem. Just as the "ark of the covenant" (*aron hab'rit*) opened access to the ancient tablets Moses was said to have received on Mt. Sinai, so too the "holy ark" (*aron hakodesh*) on our *bimah* gives us access to the covenant between the Jewish people and God written in the words of the Torah. When we take out the Torah, parade it around and read from it, it is as if we are back at the Temple engaging in a highly ritualized and religious act of worshipping God. And despite its power, it not an experience with which many of us is comfortable.

My thoughts today turn to the connection between the Torah and the Temple because we are about to celebrate the holiday of *Hanukkah* (חנוכה). The root of the word *Hanukkah* comes from the Hebrew letters ח-נ-ך meaning "dedication." Understanding the root in this way indicates that the central element of the Hanukkah experience was the rededication of our holy Temple after liberating it from the Greeks. The Maccabees didn't want to just to reclaim Jewish sovereignty; they wanted to reconstitute Jewish religious practice that is symbolized by the Temple. This is why the Talmud depicts the miracle of the oil burning for eight days when it should've lasted for only one, to indicate that God approved of this new worship led by the Maccabees.

With this religious understanding of Hanukkah in mind, it is important to understand another definition of ח-נ-ך, the root of *Hanukkah*, which connects the holiday to Torah as well. ח-נ-ך doesn't just mean "dedication", it also means "to guide, to tutor, to educate" and these are the precise actions that taking out the Torah and reading it in public like we do today are supposed to accomplish. Understanding the root in this way adds another layer to the historical act of rededicating the Temple by the Maccabees. In order to reconstitute Jewish religious practice in the Temple, the Maccabees had to begin a process of reeducation to remind us of why religious practice is so important, an educational process symbolized by the public reading of Torah.

This educational element to the story of the Maccabees is clearly visible in the 1st Book of Maccabees. Lost in the Hebrew school tale of Jews overcoming Greeks in armed conflict is the reality that the Maccabees were responding (negatively) to the assimilation of fellow Jews in their land who (in chapter 1 verse 14) built a Greek-style gymnasium in Jerusalem, stopped performing circumcision, left the "holy covenant" (*b'rit hakodesh*) to follow Greek laws, and became devoted to doing bad things in "God's eye" (*b'eynei Adonai*). These actions reflect a desire of many Jews at this time to join mainstream culture while eliminating their religious practice, a desire that resonates with Jewish life today. For instance, building a gymnasium reminds me of building a JCC with a fitness center and basketball courts like other community centers. Stopping the performance of circumcision is less about not identifying oneself as a Jew and more about reneging the religious connection to God, something attested to by the rest of the verse in which they were accused of leaving the holy covenant and doing bad things in God's eye. The Jews back then, like many of us today, just didn't see God - or worship/connection of God - as part of their Jewish identities. So forgive me for being a little anachronistic here but it seems that you could view these assimilated Jews as being "cultural, but not religious" Jews. They acted like Greeks but it didn't mean they were Greeks. They were Jewish, but they no longer felt that they could or should act like religious Jews.

(continued on the next page)

Torah & Temple: Symbolizing our Issues with Religion

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So if for the Maccabees, they wanted to teach these "cultural but not religious Jews" the value of religion with renewed worship in the Temple, does the same hold true for us? Is the reading and learning of Torah meant to teach us the value of believing in and adhering to Jewish religious practice? I think for many of us, whether we realize it or not, the answer to that question is yes. Yes, the Torah outlines how to live a religious life. Yes, the Torah indicates that we have a special relationship with God. And yes, when we take out the Torah the majesty of the experience is supposed to remind us of how the Temple was God's holy sanctuary in the midst of the people. And for many of us, seeing the Torah as a religious document makes it difficult to take its teachings to heart.

Whether it is because of our personal or familial experience or what we see being done in the world in God's name, many people, let alone fellow Jews, have issues with religion. We're not going to all of a sudden keep kosher or observe Shabbat or come to services - because that's what religious people do. Or even if we do some of those actions, we're comfortable with who we are and aren't interested in becoming *more* religious. So it makes sense then that because many of us have an allergic reaction to certain if not all aspects of things called "religious," that studying the text (i.e. Torah) that teaches those lessons is not at the top of our priority list.

Yet, the value of learning Torah is not just to lead us to become more religious, rather its value is the act of learning itself. As our sages say, "the learning of Torah is equal to all things" (*talmud Torah k'neged kulam*) (Mishnah Peah 1:1). More than deeds that result from the act of learning Torah, it's the feeling of connection to our heritage, to our tradition, to the issues that matter in our own lives that result from engaging with Torah by reading it, listening to it, and understanding it. Perhaps that may have been part of the point of the Maccabean revolt. It's not enough to simply know or feel you're Jewish yet live in all manners like the culture that surrounds you. You must engage in deeply rich and particularistic traditions - like worshipping in the Temple - to remind yourselves of the *pintele yid*, the Jewish spark that resides within us. We know that spark because we feel it when the Torah is paraded around the sanctuary. We know that spark because we feel it when we come to participate in weekly services, our holiday programs, our learning events, and all of our synagogue activities. It's not about just becoming more religious, it's about always seeking to feel more Jewish.

Kol Tuv,
Rabbi Ari Saks

got shabbat? now, shalom!

Friday Night Services - Fridays - 8pm - Open to All

Join us for spirited and lively participatory services. Each service includes elements of singing, storytelling and conversation with the community. Monthly themes:

Celebration Shabbat - December 4

Commemorate your birthday or anniversary in the upcoming month with a special Friday night celebration, to be followed by a Blowout Oneg Shabbat. (To sponsor an oneg contact Jeremy Strauss.)

Pardon the Interruption - December 11

A series of 3 conversations that interrupt the Jewish ritual service in order to understand different prayers and sections of the service on a deeper level. The conversations, each 5-7 minutes long, are thematically tied and interspersed throughout the service.

White Out Friday Night - December 18

Share in the magic and holiness of Shabbat with an evening of eating, singing, storytelling, dancing and schmoozing. It's Shabbat for the mind, soul and body. White Out Shabbat is sure to leave you dancing and singing in the street. Come dressed all in white to reflect the purity in our hearts and get ready for a service like none you've ever seen!

Saturday Morning Services - Saturdays - 10am - Open to All

Traditional, egalitarian and informative. We connect participants to traditions while actively engaging them in the service. There is ample opportunity for in-depth learning of the prayers and the Torah Portion. Monthly themes:

Torah Talk - December 5

Delve into the rich teachings of the week's Torah reading. In lieu of a formal sermon, we will pause the service after the Torah reading for a lively 10-15 minute discussion on how we can apply the wisdom of the Torah to the needs of our every day lives.

Pardon the Interruption - December 11

A series of 3 conversations that interrupt the Jewish ritual service in order to understand different prayers and sections of the service on a deeper level. The conversations, each 5-7 minutes long, are thematically tied and interspersed throughout the service.

Shabbos, Schnapps & a Schtick of Yiddishkeit - December 19 - 9am

Learn about Jewish tradition, religion and history with an early morning sip of schnapps (optional!). The experience runs in lieu of services. We'll schmooze with families from Tot Shabbat as they have a kiddie Kiddush, then learn something interesting together according to Tot Shabbat's theme for the month, and we'll wrap up with Kiddush. This program is intended for ALL members of Beth Mordecai, especially those who are more interested in learning & discussion than services.

Current Events Sermon - December 26

Rabbi Saks will deliver a formal sermon on a Jewish interpretation of a relevant current events topic.



732.407.0821
bettymf@me.com

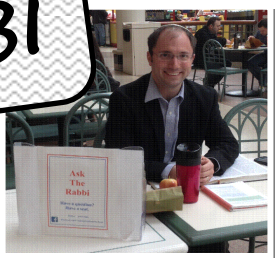


732.331.4049
straussjer@gmail.com

Tot Shabbat
CONNECTING YOUNG FAMILIES TO JEWISH LIFE.



December 19 - 10:00am



Ask the Rabbi

December 23 - 12:00pm

Menlo Park Mall Food Court

For this month's topic, "Why Women Matter", Rabbi Saks will be joined by Rabbi Eric Rosin (Neve Shalom) to discuss some of the major tenets of Conservative Judaism. This session will investigate the Conservative movement's stance on women's role in Judaism.



December 3 - 7:30pm - East Brunswick

Our 3rd parlor meetup will be on the Pillar of Shabbat. We will share favorite memories/experiences of Shabbat as a way to discuss how to make Shabbat more of an integral part of our community. Kosher snacks provided. RSVP to Rabbi Saks (ari.saks@gmail.com) by December 1.

Parlor Meetups are informal opportunities for members & those interested in the Beth Mordecai community to get to know each other better in the comfort of a home environment, while discussing important matters related to the 4 pillars of the community: Shabbat, Faith, Tradition, Belonging.



December 1 - 7:30pm - Congregation Beth Or 70 CR 516, Old Bridge, NJ

Join Rabbi Saks & Rabbi Mishkin to discuss some practical advice in navigating the tricky waters of family Hanukkah and Christmas events. The session is open to those who registered for the Grandparents Circle series. Contact Rabbi Saks for information (ari.saks@gmail.com).



December 20 - 12:30pm - St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Perth Amboy

A monthly support group to help couples negotiate issues related to faith, tradition & family that stem from having different faith backgrounds and religious traditions. Co-facilitated by Rabbi Saks & Reverend Anne-Marie Jeffrey.

LIGHT CANDLES		SHABBAT ENDS	
Dec. 4	4:12pm	Dec. 5	5:15pm
Dec. 11	4:12pm	Dec. 12	5:16pm
Dec. 18	4:14pm	Dec. 19	5:18pm
Dec. 25	4:18pm	Dec. 26	5:22pm
Jan. 1	4:23pm	Jan. 2	5:27pm
Jan. 8	4:29pm	Jan. 9	5:33pm
Jan. 15	4:36pm	Jan. 16	5:40pm
Jan. 22	4:44pm	Jan. 23	5:47pm
Jan. 29	4:53pm	Jan. 30	5:55pm

Times are specific to Perth Amboy; from Chabad.org.

Visit with Jewish War Veterans at the New Jersey Veterans Home and Hospital near Menlo Park Mall!

- **WHEN:** Every other Tuesday 3:30-4:30 pm
- **WHERE:** New Jersey Veterans Home and Hospital at 132 Evergreen Road, Edison, NJ
- **CONTACT:** Sherry Weber -- Caring Committee Chairperson
sweber7854@aol.com or 908-451-9708.
Or contact the rabbi directly -- ari.saks@gmail.com or 732-442-2431



**Next Visits:
December 8th & 22nd**

Last Purim we started visiting the Jewish Veterans so that we could help celebrate the holidays with them.

We all had a great time celebrating, chatting, playing games, and enjoying some snacks. The Rabbi even wore his lion costume!

The Rabbi and I went back during the High Holidays and we also invited all who wanted to join us no matter their religion.

The chaplain let us know how much everyone enjoyed the visits and he wants to know if we could come more frequently. And yes, we can!

We will be arranging visits every other week and would love to have other members of the congregation join us. You can come once a month or whenever you might have some time to share in the fun!



Erev Hanukkah

By Elliot Rubin

Twas erev Hanukkah and throughout the whole house
 Mom's brisket was cooking, and permeating her blouse
 The latkes were sizzling, our home smelled of oil
 We were shvitzing and tired while the chickens did boil.

There was no brick chimney, or old socks to fill
 The Kinder sat motionless right by the windowsill.
 Waiting for our Bubbe to visit that night
 And Zayde to drive her and then have a bite
 Of Momma's home cooking, and egg noodle too
 With stuffed derma tummies, we were a full crew.

Then Uncle Moishe parked in front, his old battered van,
 And out came our cousins, chalk white with no tan.
 There was Yossie and Malka and Chaim and old Tante Fran,
 And Channa and Dovid and Schmuie and some unknown man.

He was tall, and all wrinkled, and hair flaxen white
 His beard was so long it seemed not to end
 But as he stepped out, he did have to bend
 And we saw fall from his black coat
 Some letters and cards we forgot to send
 To a Rebbe some questions, just questions, to no end
 But he thought them good, maybe, that will depend.

So everyone did come for dinner that night
 The Rebbe, the family, the cousins, you see
 For erev Hanukkah there was no TV
 The family came, not just for the food
 But to gather together and quietly schmooze.



Next
 Bulletin
 Deadline

December 16

submit your
 NEWS
 or
 EVENT



Can you lend a hand?

Volunteers are needed for:

Office Assistance
 Writing for the Bulletin
 Caring Committee Visitors
 Opening Up for Services & Events
 Shabbat Morning Coffee Set-Up
 Organizing & Sponsoring Kiddush

To help, please contact the office!



Birthdays

Neil Hunter
 Larisa Barskaya
 Marsha Duvdevani
 Scott Gursky
 Renee Klein
 Alvin Kravet
 Bernard Magier

Anniversaries

Lisa & Ronald Weiss

**A DONATION HAS BEEN MADE TO THE SYNAGOGUE BY:**

Robert Arky, in memory of Arthur Arky
 Marcy Sanders Bezark, in memory of Joan Sanders
 Martin Clawans, in memory of Sylvia Clawans
 Debra & Howard Cohen, in memory of Evelyn Cohen
 Barbara Greenspan, in memory of Isador Greenspan
 Judy & Leo Kaufman, in memory of David & Sol Kaufman
 Susan & Marvin Klein, in memory of Bella & Harold Cohen
 Jean Kluff, in memory of Jack Kluff and Rachel Slotkoff
 Allan Lesslauer, in memory of Dorothy and Jack Lesslauer
 Elyse Lyons, in memory of Robert Epstein
 Bernice & Bernard Magier, in memory of Karol Magier
 Selma Mitzman, in memory of Irving Mitzman
 Arleen Price, in memory of Sylvia Boerer
 Bernice Ring, in memory of Fred Ring
 Millicent Rose & Adrian Simons, in memory of Jerome Simons
 Donna Cohen Scher, in memory of Albert Cohen
 Ronna & Richard Silberberg, in memory of Amelia Kohn
 Barbra Siperstein, in memory of Carol, Mildred & Morris Siperstein
 Dorothy & Jordan Solkowitz, in memory of Louis Spivak
 Judith & Stanley Walker, in memory of Fay Gast

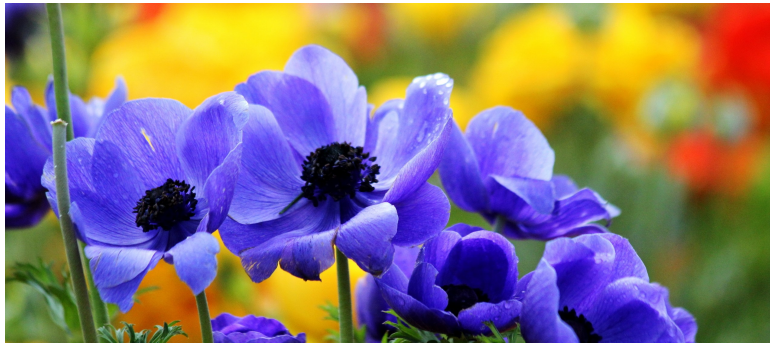
MAY THEIR MEMORY BE FOR A BLESSING.

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**Who Do I Call?**

When a death occurs, the emotion of the moment can cause a bit of confusion. Some important phone calls need to be made.

- First, a medical authority must be contacted to sign a death certificate.
- Second, the funeral home must be contacted to make arrangements to transfer the deceased to the funeral home.
- Third, contact the synagogue. A death may occur at any time of night or day; it is important to leave messages in a few places to ensure the rabbi will get back to you.

Please call/email:

Rabbi Ari Saks | 732.442.2431 or 732.442.1373 | ari.saks@gmail.com


Flynn and son
 FUNERAL HOMES

JAMES J. FLYNN, MANAGER
 424 East Ave.
 Perth Amboy, NJ 08861
 732.826.0358
 NJ Lic. No. 4152

BRENDAN J. FLYNN, MANAGER
 319 Amboy Ave. 23 Fords Ave.
 Metuchen, NJ 08840 Fords, NJ 08863
 732.548.2134 732.826.0358
 NJ Lic. No. 4105 NJ Lic. No. 2158

DECEMBER

- 01** 7:30pm - Grandparent's Circle
- 03** 7:30pm - Parlor Meetup
- 04** 8:00pm - Shabbat Services - Celebration Shabbat
- 05** 10:00am - Shabbat Services - Torah Talk
- 06** 3:00pm - Hanukkah Party
- 06** DEADLINE FOR FOOD DRIVE
- 08** 3:30pm - Veterans Home Visit
- 09** Virtual Hanukkah
- 11** 8:00pm - Shabbat Services - Pardon the Interruption
- 12** 10:00am - Shabbat Services - Pardon the Interruption
- 18** 8:00pm - White Out Shabbat
- 19** 9:00am - Shabbat Services - Schnappes & Schtickel
- 19** 10:00am - Tot Shabbat
- 20** 12:30pm - Faithful Families
- 22** 3:30pm - Veterans Home Visit
- 23** 12:00pm - Ask the Rabbi

DECEMBER

- 24** 7:00pm - Chinese Dinner & Movie Christmas Eve
- 25** 8:00pm - Shabbat Services
- 26** 10:00am - Shabbat Services - Current Events Sermon

