



Temple Beth Ora

Edmonton's Reform Synagogue

Kol Ora

Voice of Light

September 2009

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Edmonton, Alberta

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Join our Facebook group

Look forward to a full year of programs

by **Dave Chodos**

High Holy Days: Rosh Hashanah

Erev Rosh HaShanah: Friday, Sept. 18,
8 p.m.

Rosh HaShanah I: Saturday, Sept. 19,
10:30 a.m.

Rosh HaShanah II, alternative service:
Sunday, Sept. 20, 10:30 a.m.

This year, TBO will be offering an alternative worship experience on the second day of Rosh HaShanah. Join us for an experience of the heart and spirit as we chant, read and share in some reflective discussion. Together, we will explore the themes of the season, and try to place the High Holidays in the context of the Jewish year. We hope this will be an opportunity to deepen our connections to the festival and to truly hear the motifs of the season. This service will allow for personal and group reflection. Essays and poetry will be among the texts we share. We look forward to a moving and spiritual experience.

Yom Kippur

Kol Nidrei: Sunday, Sept. 27, 8 p.m.

Yom Kippur: Monday, Sept. 28, service
times listed below.

Morning service: 10:30 a.m.

Mincha: 4:30 p.m.

Yizkor: 6 p.m.

Ne'ilah: 7 p.m.

Education

Beit Sefer

When: Weekly, first class on Sunday,
Sept. 13, 10 a.m.

What: Jewish education for children
ages 5-12. For more information or
to find out about registering for the
coming school year, contact Jane
Arscott (VP Education).

Introduction to Judaism

When: First class on Sunday, Sept. 13,
10 a.m.

What: Taught by Reb Bill Dolman,
this course provides an introduction
to a wide spectrum of Jewish topics,

through readings and lively discussions.
Although the course is geared primarily
for non-Jews, it is not offered as a
conversion course.

Jewish Thought

When: First class on Sunday, Sept. 13,
10 a.m.

What: Offered as a follow-up to the
Introduction to Judaism class, this
course will explore topics related to
Jewish theology and spirituality.

Adult Hebrew classes

When: Beginning in November

What: Have you always wanted to be
able to read the Hebrew in the prayer
book? Well now you can!

Join us for a beginning Hebrew course
taught by Rabbi Harari. Learn letters,
vowels, roots, and more.

Torah Study

When: Saturday mornings, 10 a.m.,
twice a month

What: Join us for a discussion of the
week's Torah portion. The Torah
study is held on the second and third
Saturday of each month at the TBO/
Chevra Kadisha building.

Shabbat

Kabbalat Shabbat: Friday evenings, 8
p.m.

Shabbat Shacharit: Saturday, 10 a.m.,
first Saturday of each month

Tot Shabbat

When: Friday evening, 6:30 p.m.,
once a month

What: A brief (30 minute) program
for children ages 2-4, the Tot Shabbat
program incorporates songs, stories and
other activities to help introduce young
children to the Shabbat service.

Family Service

When: Friday evening, 7 p.m., first
Saturday of each month

What: This is a slightly abbreviated
service oriented towards kids age five
and up. It includes singing and, in
place of the Torah service, an engaging
story.

Rabbi's message...

Time of repentance and reflection



My Friends,

In just a few weeks, we will enter into the Hebrew month of Elul, the month preceding the High Holidays, which serves as a period of reflection upon the previous year, and preparation for Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Midrash tells us that the Hebrew letters that make up the name of the month of Elul, *Aleph, Lamed, Vav, and Lamed*, are an acronym for the phrase

Ani L'dodi v'dodi Li, I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. This phrase serves as a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel: as is often the case in many relationships, we, Israel, have drifted apart from God throughout the year.

Now, we begin a period of reflection and of *t'shuva*, translated as repentance, but literally meaning return. During the month of Elul, we return to God; during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we rekindle our relationship.

While our sages understood the High Holidays to be a literal period of judgment, a time during which our fate for the coming year is decided and sealed, we attach another dimension to this concept today. In modern times, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, as well as the month of Elul, are understood in terms of *t'shuva*, repentance and return. We believe that no matter what we may have or have not done in the past year, there is always the opportunity to make amends. The focus on self-reflection, consideration of our actions and our interactions with others and with God, is important at this season. It reminds us of our own limitations and of our humanity. It reminds us that we may have missed the mark this year, but that we can always try again. We are constantly striving to lead a life that is righteous and just. This season reminds us of this goal and helps us to achieve it.

As we enter into this period of reflection, I'd like to share with you a Hassidic teaching that I hope will serve as a guide for your contemplation:

Keep two truths in your pocket, and take them out according to the need of the moment. Let one be: 'For my sake alone was the world created' and the other 'I am but dust and ashes.'

May we come to realize our true selves this Hebrew month of Elul, and may our reflection be meaningful as well as help us to strive for holiness.

- Rabbi Carmit Harari

Service Schedule

Kabbalat Shabbat
August 28 8 p.m.

Shabbat Shacharit
August 29..... 10 a.m.

Family Kabbalat Shabbat
Sept. 4 7 p.m.

Kabbalat Shabbat
Sept. 11 8 p.m.

Erev Rosh HaShanah
Sept. 18 8 p.m.

Rosh HaShanah I
Sept. 19..... 10:30 a.m.

Rosh HaShanah II
Sept. 20..... 10:30 a.m.

Please join us...

Family Shabbat Services:

On the first Friday evening of each month, we hold our family service. These services invite parents and children to welcome Shabbat together through story and song, and to explore the prayers of kabbalat Shabbat. We invite the young and young at heart alike to join us on the first Friday evening of each month at 7 p.m. for a spirited and spiritual experience!

Tot Shabbat:

Join us each month for Tot Shabbat. How do we welcome Shabbat? What is this day all about? Through music and activity, young children will learn about this special day, its rituals and its significance. Our next Tot Shabbat will be announced at a later date. We invite families and young children to welcome Shabbat together with us!

Historical past ties in with healing the world

by Rabbi Carmit Harari

On July 30, Jews throughout the world gathered in solidarity as they commemorated *Tish'a b'Av*. Literally translated the ninth of Av (the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av), this date is a significant date on the Jewish calendar.

It is a day of mourning for the destruction of both the first and second Temples which stood in Jerusalem. Both are said to have been destroyed on the same date — the ninth of Av — and the day is noted within Jewish communities today through fasting, the recitation of appropriate liturgy, and the reading of the scroll of Lamentations which details the destruction of Jerusalem and exile as the result of Israel's disobedience, but ends on a note of hope that we will yet return to worship at a rebuilt Temple.

But, as Rabbi Mark Washofsky notes, "the observance of Tisha Be'Av, the ninth day of the month of Av, poses some special problems for Reform Jews...Reform theology has not generally looked upon the loss of the Temple and the expulsion of the people of Israel from its land as a catastrophe to be lamented by liberal Jews."¹

Because our movement's understanding of Messianism excludes a return to sacrificial worship, it can be difficult to mourn the destruction of the Temple. Some thinkers even saw this as a positive rather than a negative turning point in our people's history.

Throughout the ages, Reform prayer books have dealt with the observance of Tish'a B'Av in various ways. Some have completely ignored the day, rendering it a relic of days past, incompatible with the modern observances of the movement. Others even went so far as to reinterpret the day as a day of joy, based on the above stated notion that the Temple's destruction was a positive point in our history.

But some prayer books, particularly in more recent years, have included liturgy in observance of Tish'a B'Av, based on an understanding that "...however much we feel at home in our Western lands, and however little we feel the need to pray for a restoration of sacrificial worship, the tragedies and sufferings of Jewish history cannot be erased by the experience of but a few years of Enlightenment and Emancipation. The ninth of Av is a moment of great power in the Jewish calendar, the time when we give voice

to our sadness as a people for the calamities which have befallen us. The Holocaust is a reminder that deliverance has not yet come to us, that unspeakable horror can be visited upon us even in our 'progressive' age."²

Reform custom today surrounding the observance of Tish'a B'Av varies from community to community. Generally speaking, the day is understood and observed in a historical context. URJ camps often hold candlelight ceremonies where songs like 'By the Waters of Babylon' are sung, readings are shared, and the community makes note of modern-day tragedies. Congregations too, throughout North America, hold similar services.

Yet, like the festival of Shavu'ot, which falls at the beginning of summer vacation, it is often difficult to make a minyan in order to observe Tish'a B'Av. This year, as Erev Tish'a B'Av fell on a week night, Temple Beth Ora took into account the great difficulty our membership might have rushing from work on a week night to attend a short service. As such, we opted to make note of the date here, and to attempt to explain its significance, and our reason for opting not to commemorate it as a community this year. This is the custom in many Reform congregations, particularly due to the "controversial" nature of the observance.

As we enter into a period of reflection preceding the High Holidays, a period of reckoning of the soul, I would like to suggest that Tish'a B'Av can be viewed as a national day of the reckoning of our collective soul. This day, understood according to traditional theology, takes us to task for our disobedience of God's commands. Its placement on the calendar foreshadows the upcoming period of soul searching we will do as individuals once we as a community have begun our repentance.

Although we as a TBO community did not mark this date together, I would suggest that we continue to take into account modern — day tragedies throughout the year. May we always continue to pray for the day when all Jews and all people throughout the world may live in peace and harmony. And may our people's historical experience inspire us to take on the sacred task of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world.

Hashiveinu Adonai Eleicha V'nashuva

Return us to you, O God, and we shall return.

1 Washofsky, Mark, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, UAHC Press, New York, 2001, Pg. 131

2 Washofsky, Mark, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, UAHC Press, New York, 2001, Pg. 131

New member profile: Dorothy Woodman

Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What was it like to live in Camrose while you were living there?

What draws you back to Edmonton? What are you doing when you're not at TBO activities (work and play)?

I am a second generation Edmontonian, but I have spent most of my adult life in Camrose, where I raised my family.

During this time I also worked at various jobs: I was in charge of the Children's Department in the Public Library, I worked for a local NGO and I taught private piano lessons. I have been active as a volunteer in Amnesty International and I have sat on the board of the food bank, a seniors' care facility and the women's shelter, all in Camrose.

During my free time I enjoy interesting movies, listening to live performances and cooking. Thanks to the gorgeous trails in Camrose, in the past five years I have taken up running, as well as recreational cycling and cross-country skiing. Now living in Edmonton I look forward to continuing these interests.

Can you tell us about your research?

I am currently completing my dissertation on the presence of metaphor in a breast cancer medical text and in writings by survivors, as well as how images of breast cancer bodies reflect cultural ideologies and in what ways survivors offer new interpretations. I am in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta.

My interest in disease and disability

will continue in my next project, a literary analysis of texts by South African author J.M. Coetzee.

What drew you to Reform Judaism?

For a number of years I have had a serious interest in Reform Judaism.

What drew you to Temple Beth Ora? Do you have any hopes and dream for this congregation?

Thanks to friendly members and supportive rabbis, Temple Beth Ora has been a good environment in which to further explore my interest, to test my level of commitment and to grow in my understanding of the Jewish faith and traditions. Now converted, I look forward to continuing my study and contributing to the local community, especially in the areas of education and inter-faith dialogue.

Torah portion was a challenge to learn, says student

Georgia-Rae Forbes had her bat mitzvah on Aug. 22. She discussed with Kol Ora what the celebration means to her.

What made you want to become a Bat Mitzvah?

I wanted to become a Bat Mitzvah because I love how I get to celebrate becoming of age, and we get to do it in such fun ways as a Jew.

What have been the highlights of your Bat Mitzvah preparation?

The highlights are probably getting to spend so much time and work with the girls who have so much in common with me in my B'nai Mitzvah classes because we can all relate in what we are doing.

What have been the challenges of preparing for your Bat Mitzvah?

The challenges have definitely been learning my Torah portion.

What are you most looking forward to and why about becoming a Bat Mitzvah?

I'm looking forward to be able to say that I'm of age, and that I got the chance to be called up to the Torah.

What are your hobbies — what do you do in your spare time?

My hobbies are dancing, which I've been doing forever, modeling, acting, and just having fun!

What grade are you in and what school do you attend?

I'm going into Grade 8 and I attend Westminster Junior High.

What advice do you have for up-and-coming B'nei Mitzvah students?

My advice would be, no matter how hard it may seem, just keep pushing on because in the end it will be so worth it to become Bat Mitzvah.

Temple Beth Ora president's message



by **Felix
Fridman**

The approach of the new year is a good time for reflection on our accomplishments of the past year and the challenges that lie ahead for our congregation.

A couple of months ago we had our annual general meeting (AGM) and at the time I made the analogy that the past year could have been written as classic business school case study.

The abstract of the case study would have been: "Small congregation about to become homeless uses ingenuity, hard work, collaborative and inclusive decision-making processes, and a little bit of Mazal to find a fantastic full-time Rabbi and a wonderful new home."

Our congregation's ingenuity, commitment, hard work, and shared vision helped us create a new spiritual home — unique among Reform congregations in North America, through our wonderful partnership with the Edmonton Chevra Kadisha — and hire our spiritual leader, Rabbi Carmit Harari.

Inclusive decision-making and engagement in a community is not always an easy process. It can be

frustrating at times on many levels, but the result is that we function as a community and act on our goals as a diverse yet unified congregation. Learning how to work together was a real learning process for all of us and the results are benefitting all.

The key is that we know how to include and that is a very real foundation to build on in the coming years.

Mazal is a factor you won't find often in a business case. It means fortune (it comes from the Hebrew root for destiny). When I think of what we have accomplished over the past year, I prefer to think of Mazal resulting from belief and perseverance. Our personal and transformative nature of belief at many levels has inspired change and catalyzed action, and has, in turn, resulted in our many successes.

We have had a rewarding and productive year. Settled as we are with stable finances and an excellent rabbi in our new home, and anchored on our collective commitment to Judaism and its values we have three main challenges ahead of us.

Address the assumptions in the six year plan: We developed a strategic plan to help us understand what we want and how to focus our efforts.

The plan includes a six-year financial plan.

Key to the financial plan is the Rabbinic Continuity Fund, which will provide stability for the next five years so we can dedicate ourselves to achieving our objectives. A crucial objective is to expand and grow sufficiently so that in five years we will be able to meet our financial needs solely through membership fees, fair share, and casino funds.

Engage our Youth: We want to retain our post-bat and bar mitzvah youth as contributing members of the congregation and hiring a youth advisor this fall will be the first step.

Social Action: We need to shape our TBO vision into social action that engages our congregants and builds on our unique profile in Edmonton and Alberta. Now, more than ever, the vulnerable in our society need helping hands.

I am confident that in the coming year, each of us can be counted on, either as a new or continuing member, to help maintain our collective ingenuity, hard work, and our collaborative and inclusive approach in building the TBO community.

Shana tova v'metukah

Thank you to our donors...

Donations from June 3 to Aug. 12

General Fund

Oneg Shabbat Sponsorship

The Gall family in memory of Karen Gall's father, Jack Young Z"l

The Poelzer family in honour of Rachel's bat mitzvah

Jerry and Mary Jane Klein in memory of Pearl Klein, mother of Jerry Klein

The Barer-Bailin, Hundert and Nobleman families in honour of the bat mitzvah of Maxine Fine.

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

From the Poelzer family with appreciation to Rabbi Harari for her assistance with Rachel's bat mitzvah

From Chavurat HaShir in honour of Rabbi Harari's installation.

From Phyllis Bright and Kayla Mandshein in honour of Rabbi Harari's installation.

From the Wishart-Waldman Family with appreciation to Rabbi Harari for her assistance making Elizabeth's bat mitzvah a wonderful experience.

From the Shaw-Frank family with thanks to Rabbi Harari for all of her support and assistance with Oriana's bat mitzvah

From Sheila Bailin and Dan Barer to The Shaw-Frank family in memory of Florence Shaw, mother of John Shaw.

From Sara and Saul Zalik in honour of the Devin's wedding anniversary.

From Kathleen Thurber, Felix Fridman and sons to the Shaw-Frank family in memory of Florence Shaw, mother of John Shaw.

Building Fund

From Jim Moses in memory of his parents

Music Fund

From the Poelzer family to Chavurat HaShir for their beautiful voices during Rachel's bat mitzvah

From the Wishart-Waldman family to Chavurat HaShir for their beautiful voices making Elizabeth's bat mitzvah a wonderful experience.

From the Shaw-Frank family to Chavurat HaShir for making Oriana's bat mitzvah an even more joyful event.

From the Friedenthal family to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein.

From Wendy Caplan and Don Westlake to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein

From Sandy Gitter-Mannes and David Mannes to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein

From Miriam and Allan Devins to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein

From the Members of Chavurat

HaShir to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein

Mishkan T'Filah Dedication

The Poelzer family in honour of Rachel being called to the Torah as a bat mitzvah.

Judy, Pat, Jenna and Rachel Poelzer in loving memory of Sandor and Blanka Hacker

David Chodos and Natasha Krahn family in loving memory of Natasha's grandfathers, Elmer Ewert and George Krahn

David Chodos and Natasha Krahn family in loving memory of David's maternal grandmother, Shirley Leis

David Chodos and Natasha Krahn family in loving memory of David's paternal grandparents, Louis and Connie Chodos

The Shaw-Frank family in Honour of Cantor David Mannes for his wonderful work in teaching Oriana Hebrew and helping prepare her for her bat mitzvah

The Binnington family to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein.

Sheila Bailin and Dan Barer to Phyllis Bright in memory of Kayla Mandshein.

Tree of Life

The Poelzer family in loving memory of Sandor Hacker

Temple Beth Ora seeks youth advisor candidates

Temple Beth Ora is looking for a young, dynamic advisor to work with 12 to 15-year-olds in developing a youth group at the synagogue. Youth group activities may include social, religious and social action themes. Applicant must have demonstrated experience working in youth-focused

program development. Applicant should be knowledgeable about, and comfortable with, Reform Judaism, and should help inspire young people to be a part of Jewish community in Edmonton.

The position is part-time, four hours per week, from the beginning of

October 2009 to the end of May 2010, salary is \$20/hour.

To apply, please send a resume to Temple Beth Ora, 12313 105 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T5N 0Y5.

The position will remain open until a suitable candidate is found.

Torah portion teaches about listening to authority

by Rachel Valerie Poelzer
D'var Torah from June 27

This week's Torah portion is called "Korach", named after the man Korach, son of Izhar. It is written in the Book of Numbers, or *bamidbar* in Hebrew, which means: in the wilderness. My portion talks about a rebellion led by Korach, Dathan and Aviram, and the punishment God gave them and their followers as a result of that rebellion.

Since I turned 13 about a month ago, I thought the concepts of rebellion and punishments would be a particularly good topic to focus on today.

While wandering the desert, Korach, Dathan and Aviram gathered up 250 followers and rose up against Moses and Aaron saying "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Eternal (Lord) is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Eternal (Lord)'s congregation?"

When Moses heard this, he fell on his face out of powerlessness. He replied to Korach by telling him that God will decide who is holy and who is a fit leader. The next day, they all went to the Tent of Meeting and put fire in their fire pans. Then they put incense on the fire. God rejected the incense of Korach, Dathan and Aviram. God told Moses to tell the innocent people to flee from the camp so that they would not be punished for the sins of Korach and his band. After they left, the Earth opened its mouth and consumed Korach. Then a great fire burned his 250 followers.

In the Torah, it says that Korach led the rebellion against Moses and Aaron. However, most commentators see this as a much bigger rebellion — a rebellion against God. They believe that in questioning Aaron and Moses' authority to lead the Israelites; they have actually questioned God's authority to choose their leader. All people involved died a dramatic death. Korach was swallowed by the Earth and his 250 followers were burned. So why does God go so far as to kill all of these people?

Jewish tradition does not teach that it is wrong to question authority. What is at issue here is the motivation behind the questioning. As *Pirkei Avot*, the lessons of our ancestors, teaches: "When an argument is for the sake of heaven, the argument will lead to an established result. When an argument is not for the sake of heaven, it will not lead to any established result. What is an argument for the sake of heaven? That of Hillel and Shammai. What is an argument not for the sake of heaven? That of Korah

and his group." (Pirkei Avot 5:17)

Hillel and Shammai argued and questioned points of law to deepen their understanding and their commitment to following our traditions. Korach and his followers, however, were engaged in a power struggle for leadership of the community, not in an argument for the sake of heaven. Therefore, the very dramatic punishments makes an example out of Korach and his followers to prevent future rebellions.

I agree with the Torah in that God had the authority to choose leaders for our people and that nobody had the right to question that authority.

My opinion might have been different if Korach had had a good reason for his rebellion, but the only reason given in the Torah was that Korach and his followers believed that Moses and Aaron thought too highly of themselves. I think that Moses and Aaron were very suitable leaders for the Jewish people because they always followed God's command, at least up until this point, and because they made just decisions.

So is there an example of justified questioning of authority in the Torah? In fact, the story of Zelophehad and his five daughters provides a wonderful example of not only the appropriate questioning of a point of law, but an instance when such questioning results in a change in the law itself — God agrees that something was unintentionally unjust and makes a correction in response to that injustice.

In this story, Zelophehad (*tze-la-fa-khad*) passes away without leaving a male heir, so his five daughters ask Moses if they can inherit his belongings.

It is important that we realize the difference between these two stories. In one, the authority of God is challenged for no good reason in a very disrespectful way. In the other story, the daughters ask respectfully if a rule could be bent for them because of their circumstance.

When Korach and Moses offered their incense to God, it was sort of like a court case, where both sides plead their case through their prior actions. God would be like the Supreme Court judge in this scenario because God has the power to make final decisions without any further argument.

Another way to relate this situation to one that most teens around my age would understand is rebelling against your parents.

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When Korach questioned God, he did not have a good reason for his rebellion — he wasn't trying to correct any sort of injustices. Similarly, we can't just rebel against our parents because we decide we don't like the rules.

However, like in the other story, if we provide a good reason for our parents to consider a change of rules, and do it in a respectful manner, it is often acceptable. Now that's not to say that we will be put to death for arguing with our parents, but we may get a harsh punishment.

This story teaches us that we need to respect the authority of those in power, and specific to this story, God.

As I become Bat Mitzvah, daughter of the commandments, today, I will be accepting the responsibility to honour the authority of God. Being under the authority of God means following the commandments that God has given us. One of the commandments that I find particularly meaningful is to

engage in acts of "gimilute chasadim", or acts of loving kindness.

For one of my Mitzvah projects this year, I have volunteered for Bikor Cholim, Edmonton's Jewish visiting society. My involvement has been visiting with two elderly Jewish women who are living in an assisted living facility and who do not get many visitors. Their stories are very interesting and I greatly enjoyed spending time with them. I am going to continue my weekly visits with them because I enjoyed it so much.

I am also collecting school supplies for United Way's "Tools for School" campaign which provides school supplies for low-income students. I chose this because I believe that education is one of the most valuable needs for children and children cannot achieve to their full potential if they do not have proper supplies.

There is more information in the foyer on how you can contribute to this cause. Thank you to those who have or are planning to donate.

Bat mitzvah is a natural next step for student

Maxine Fine became a bat mitzvah on Aug. 29. She discussed with Kol Ora what the celebration means to her.

What made you want to become a Bat Mitzvah?

After my conversion, a Bat Mitzvah was the next step to becoming fully Jewish for me. I just thought it was right. Also, being with Temple Beth Ora for so long and pursuing a Jewish lifestyle made me want to have a Bat Mitzvah even more.

What have been the highlights of your Bat Mitzvah preparation?

I think the main highlights of my preparation were being able to study with my friends who I was close to and people who I knew would support me and having a tutor who was easy to get along with. Also, the rabbi made the process a lot more calming.

What have been the challenges of preparing for your Bat Mitzvah?

Balancing school was the most challenging part. Also,

wanting to join teams or be in plays while balancing my prep. was hard but I had my priorities straight.

What are you most looking forward to and why about becoming a Bat Mitzvah?

I most look forward to being the last bat mitzvah of the year and getting it done and over with because then I can just relax and go back to not worrying about what things would conflict with one another.

What are your hobbies — what do you do in your spare time?

My hobbies are playing basketball, acting, hanging out with friends and watching TV.

What grade are you in and what school do you attend?

I'm going into Grade 8 at Vernon Barford.

What advice do you have for up-and-coming B'nei Mitzvah students?

My advice for up and coming Bat Mitzvahs are try not to have too many things going on at once and make sure you're organized so you don't get too stressed out.

D'var Torah discusses if we should question God

by Oriana Shaw

D'var Torah from June 20

My Torah portion, sh'lach lecha, means send forth for yourself. It is a moderately controversial portion in my mind when it comes to the punishments Adonai sets.

As it begins, God tells Moses to send 12 emissaries to scout out the land of Canaan (which is now Israel); one representative from each tribe. Adonai explains that this is promised to be the Israelites' land where they and generations to come would prosper.

The emissaries are asked to see what kind of country it is: are the people few or many, weak or strong, is the soil rich, are there forests, the towns open or secluded? And other questions along those lines.

They then set out on their expedition. When the spies return after a 40 day journey, their reports are distinctly diverse. The large majority, 10 of the 12 men, return saying the land is impossible to conquer; that the people who inhabit the country are their enemies who have powerful defence. The spies exclaim that they felt like grasshoppers in the sight of their large and fortified villages.

Yet two men, Caleb and Joshua, rebel against the rest of the group, praising the land and encouraging the people to try to gain possession of the land, saying that they could surely overcome the obstacles.

But Joshua and Caleb had no impact on the Israelites. They had already been persuaded by the reports of the majority of the spies. Then they started questioning the authority of Adonai. Why would God send us to fight a battle we will lose? One man even saying let us head back to Egypt!

After this betrayal and faithlessness Adonai banishes the Israelites to wander the desert for the next 40 years. Now I'm not all for gentle punishment but at least to me forty years seems like an awful lot.

In the end Joshua gets rewarded for his devotion by becoming Moses' successor.

Also near the end of this portion, Adonai creates a way to help people remember God's commandments: a practice we still follow today, which would be the wearing of tzitit or fringes.

As Pinchas Peli, an Israeli rabbi and distinguished commentator states, people are absent minded, careless and forgetful of their obligations and easily tempted into

dangerous behaviour. The commandment to wear fringes is to be a visible reminder to people of our ethical and religious commandments.

To me, this Torah portion teaches that one should have unquestioning faith in Adonai even with no concrete proof of God's existence. This is a lesson I have trouble accepting, because as much as I try convincing myself otherwise, I still would have likely behaved as the Israelites did in that context.

Most commentators focus on the seriousness of the sin committed. For example, Aaron Wildavsky, author of *Moses as a Political Leader*, suggests that the emissaries' sin is more serious than lying, that the people have left Egypt with God's promise of conquering Israel and they've gone through a lot of hardship to get to the point they are at and now that they are almost at the end of their journey, the majority of the scouts are encouraging them to believe that the journey was a bad idea from the beginning — in other words, questioning what God said. That is their sin.

I understand why they think this sin was so great and worthy of punishment but on the other hand I can't help myself for being empathetic towards the Israelites and their point of view.

So it boils down to the basic question of whether you agree with the 12th century scholar and commentator, Maimonides' view that it is impossible for human intellect to contradict that of God and be correct. Or if you think it is reasonable for people to want proof before they believe with perfect faith.

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, a Harvard Ph.D. and scholar who has written a lot about Jewish ideas and religion, argues that "What one believes, one cannot know. What one knows, one cannot believe."

To believe something means that you are loyal to the core belief even without proof based on personal experience. Whereas if they are demanding proof before they will follow the higher authority, then they are questioning their faith.

After reading these commentators' thoughts, and discussions with family members, I then came to a conclusion that this principle of believing without tangible proof can make sense.

For example, my parents have told me many times not to do something because it was dangerous.

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Even though until I tried I wouldn't know for sure that it was dangerous I still just had to take their word for it, and accept the rules or "commandments" of the higher more experienced authority.

Personally I think it is okay to have that little voice in your head doubting what you are doing as long as you follow through in the end on the principles you have set as your fundamental beliefs and values.

With the Israelites, they have accepted and embraced Adonai as the highest authority that clearly has greater experience and knowledge than they, so I think they were wrong to abandon their core belief merely because of popular opinion. When they have chosen to follow God they certainly should have definite faith in God's final decision.

So all in all, I believe that the Israelites and 10 of the spies committed a great sin worthy of punishment by God. That said, I think the punishment would have been just as effective being, I don't know ... maybe 10, 20 years shorter.

To me this portion ties in with becoming a Bat Mitzvah for one core reason; that being the tzitit. Becoming a Bat Mitzvah literally means "daughter of the commandments" and given that I have just gotten my first tallit I am symbolically and literally taking on the responsibility of the following of the commandments to be not only a good Jew but a good, moral person in general.

Though to many people the tzitit can have a much deeper meaning as well: a reminder to slow down their chaotic lives and pause to contemplate and soak in the higher value of life and to uncover a bit more of a personal connection to Adonai.

Either way, with this reminder they find themselves becoming better people, making smarter more ethical

decisions in all areas of life. If the Israelites had just had this simple reminder of faith, imagine how much the outcome of this portion would have changed.

Part of becoming a bar or bat mitzvah at this synagogue, involves completing a mitzvah project, which is a project taken on by each student to benefit a worthy individual or cause.

I have chosen to support an organization for a cause I find specifically vital in the world today because one in 12 people worldwide is malnourished, including 160 million children under the age of 5.

The cause is to end starvation, starting in the Sahara Desert. They don't ask for food or even money because realistically the cost of shipping food would be greater than the benefit of the cause.

All they are asking for is seeds of fruits and vegetables that you would regularly dispose of, because these seeds we take for granted are hard to find this part of the world and are highly expensive there.

Doctor Willem Van Cotthem and a team of scientists have found a way to grow tropical fruits and vegetables with very little water and fertilizers, using a water stocking soil conditioner.

This way if you give to this cause you will be accomplishing one of the highest levels of tzedakah. Maimonides, who I mentioned earlier, created a mitzvah ladder where helping people help themselves is the highest level. The gardens created from the few seeds given re-germinate for themselves, creating a perpetual garden.

I have set up a display in the foyer with pictures and more information about this important cause. Feel free to take one of the pre-addressed envelopes so you can easily take part in this worthy project. And thank you to those who have already become involved.

Shabbat shalom.

TBO seeks social action path for this year

by **Francie Nobleman**

We are exploring what we want to do, as a congregation, as social action as we move into a new year. Our president, Felix Fridman, wrote an inspiring column in the spring issue of Kol Ora, and several people expressed interest in becoming involved in some way.

That led us to invite a guest to our annual general meeting on June 18 to talk about one option.

The guest, Laura Jeffries, is a staff member of the Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA).

Rabbi Carmit Harari and Miriam Devins took part in a meeting of GEA the end of April, after the rabbi was approached to see if Temple Beth Ora would like to become a member. Laura offered us a helpful explanation of what GEA does and the processes they use.

Participation in the Greater

Edmonton Alliance is one option for TBO.

GEA is a coalition of 37 organizations, including, so far, non-profit organizations, unions and faith groups.

The Greater Edmonton Alliance began in the 1990s in response to increasing pressure on communities with limited resources, to deal with troubling social issues.

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Their basic premise is that there is more power and imagination in many than there is in one or few.

The following information is taken directly from their website.

“The Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA) is a broad-based citizens’ organization which works to connect, train, and organize the communities of Greater Edmonton across religious, labour, ethnic, class and neighbourhood lines to take action for the common good.

Our primary goal is to develop local leadership and organized power to work for social justice. We strive to hold both public and private power holders accountable for their public responsibilities, as well as to initiate actions and programs of our own to solve community, economic and ecological problems. We are multi-issue. The issues we work on come from within our institutions, from the concerns of the people.”

This “collection of moderate citizens” felt that together, they possessed the ability to “solve our personal, family and community problems”. Laura explained that GEA supports the process of listening to

each member organization’s concerns and getting to know the needs of the community. Each year the GEA chooses to focus on specific goals and member groups work together towards achieving these goals.

For the 2008/2009 year the goals are:

1. Affordable Housing — Creating more affordable housing spaces, in addition to making housing utilities more affordable through conservation retrofits in many Edmonton neighbourhoods. In the past three years, they have created 438 units of affordable housing in Edmonton.

2. Long Term Care — Working to engage government MLAs in direct relationships with long-term care staff and the families who need it to make it more accessible and more dignified.

3. Shake the Hand that Feeds You — Creating direct relationships between local farmers and organized congregations as well as creating greater access to local food in order to support a sustainable local economy and reduce carbon emissions.

4. Sustainable Works Edmonton — A campaign designed to develop a new well paid workforce and to reduce the carbon foot print

through retrofits of many residential, small commercial and institutional buildings throughout greater Edmonton.

5. Leadership Training

Helping to develop and mentor the future leaders of our member organizations.

Pathway possibilities for Temple Beth Ora

AGM participants responded to a short survey after Laura’s presentation, to let us know if and how they saw TBO could become active in social action and social justice.

All participants indicated that social action was important to them. The survey then asked congregants what type of projects would be most suitable for TBO.

These projects included: speaking out on social issues or on global issues; raising funds to contribute to local needs; raising funds to contribute to global needs, gathering items for particular communities; becoming involved in hands-on projects; taking action on local issues. The results are printed below.

Speak out on local human rights issues	Speak out on global human rights issues	Raise funds to contribute to local needs	Raise funds to contribute to global needs	Gather items needed for particular communities	Become involved in hands-on projects...	Take action on local issues
9	3	5	3	9	9	12

Felix will be bringing together people who are interested in being involved in helping with short-term projects or as part of a social action committee on Thursday, Oct. 29, to discuss the interests expressed in the survey responses. The survey provides a good beginning to shape a new path for social action for Temple Beth Ora. If you would like to become involved and have not yet indicated your interest, please let Felix know.

