

Congregation Etz Chaim

September 2012/5773

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Swimming with Hebrew

By David Strassler

"Opened in the summer of 2008, the Brandeis University-Middlebury School of Hebrew combines the best of two worlds—a time-tested curriculum developed at Brandeis and an immersion-learning environment for which the Middlebury Language Schools have been celebrated for nearly a century." (www.middlebury.edu/ls/hebrew)

For 3 weeks this summer, I immersed myself in learning Hebrew at Middlebury College in Vermont. At times, I felt myself drowning. Much of the time, I felt like I was treading water. After a 2 day orientation, I signed a contract that I would only speak Hebrew for 3 weeks. I knew that this time would be intense, but I didn't realize how intense and how it would affect me.

Some background might help you understand how I decided to embark on this journey. I have been studying at Hebrew College in Boston for the past 3 years, once a week for 3 hours, studying mostly Biblical Hebrew. I felt I needed a more intense experience to help me advance to the next level.

The frequent question I get is: Why? Especially during this summer when I felt most overwhelmed, I asked myself the same question. The two reasons are:

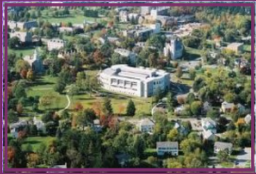
1. To be able to translate Hebrew so I can understand what I read, especially Torah. I hope to then come up with my own translation and be able to more fully participate in discussions about the nuances of Torah and the

origins of Jewish values.

2. One day, I hope that my wife, Beth, and I will spend part of our year in Israel. Learning Hebrew will help us communicate better with Israelis.

Because of my schedule, I was only able to spend the first three weeks in the seven week program. A placement exam was given during the orientation, and I was placed in a class with 11 other students in Level 2 (out of 4 Levels). There were a total of 55 students in the Hebrew program. I was thrilled to be at this level, having worked hard on mastering some basic auditory skills by following the "Pimsleur Modern Hebrew Program" daily for the previous three months. So what was so intense for me? Every student in the program was challenged at some level. What I have learned as an adult is that I am a very strong visual learner, and a very weak auditory learner. In class, I felt like I was treading water, as our teacher would speak exclusively in Hebrew, and expect us to answer her in Hebrew.

In the beginning, if I understood 25 % of what she said, that would be exaggerating. My approach was to try to piece together words that I understood to decode her message. I then added visual cues from what others were doing in the class, and I was able to "manage" (barely, in my opinion). As time went by, I slowly started to understand more, and be able to converse in an elementary way. I would choose from my limited vocabulary to try to express the simplest of concepts. Communicating what I was going to do or where I was going to go for an evening was challenging.



Middlebury College,
Middlebury, Vermont
Image source: [Albany
Aerial Photos](#) .

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Swimming with Hebrew, cont.

By David Strassler

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A typical day was class for 6 hours and homework for 4 hours. Homework was easier for me, because it was all written. But the classes were grueling, and I had to use all my energy to try to understand what was said and then participate or share my own opinions.

Our 3 meals a day were in one of the campus cafeterias with other Hebrew students and faculty. All conversation, of course, was in Hebrew. In addition, I viewed Israeli films (with English subtitles), sang Hebrew songs, listened to children's stories in Hebrew, participated in Shabbat services and played volleyball. Everyday was full (of Hebrew)-from waking up to bedtime. I lived in one of the dorms, sharing a suite with 3 other men. And for my escape, I

would either bicycle the hills of Vermont or hike in the Green Mountains. I never did dream in Hebrew, but Hebrew songs filled my brain as I biked or hiked.

Now I am comfortable having conversations in Hebrew at an elementary level. It feels like I passed an important hurdle in learning how to use the Hebrew language. I am planning to continue my studies this fall with my Middlebury teacher, either in a class or a tutorial. I also will take an online class from Hebrew College, called Perkei Avot: Ethics of My Fathers. And, believe it or not, I plan to return to Middlebury next summer for another 3 weeks, hoping to spend my time there "swimming with Hebrew".



Middlebury College class picture

High Holiday Services Congregation Etz Chaim

Rosh Hashanah

Sunday, September 16

6:45 pm Evening Service

Monday, September 17

9:00 am-Preliminary Prayers

9:30 am Morning Service

11:30 am Family Service

12:30 pm Tashlich

6:45 pm Evening Service

Tuesday, September 18

9:30 am-Service

No Evening Service

Yom Kippur

Tuesday, September 25

6:30 pm Kol Nidre:

Wednesday, September 26:

9:00 am-Preliminary Prayers

9:30 am- Morning Service

11:00 am Yizkor (Memorial) Service

11:00 am- Family Service

4:00 pm- Afternoon Service

Community Break Fast to follow (around 6:30 pm)

Potluck Dinners 6:00 p.m.

FRIDAY, OCT. 26

SUNDAY, DEC. 16 (CHANNUKAH)

FRIDAY, JAN. 25 (TU B'SHVAT)

SUNDAY, FEB. 24 (PURIM)

Please join us for potluck dinner, then relax and enjoy good food with your temple friends/family for a couple of hours.

Mikvat Shalom Holiday Announcement

By Susan Lawrence

Mikvat Shalom will be available by appointment for use prior to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. A mikvah immersion is meant to observe our transition from one state of being to another before a marriage or a bar/bat mitzvah, after completion of treatment for an illness, or in observance of *taharat hamishpacha*.

While it is not mentioned in the Torah, immersion on Erev Yom Kippur is a very old tradition that serves to prepare us for the true purpose of this important day. The word "mikvah" comes from the word "hope." At this time of *teshuvah* and transformation, we are filled with resolve both to enter into the spirit and meaning of the holidays and to emerge renewed and purposeful as we begin a new year.

We welcome you to observe this mitzvah with us this year at Mikvat Shalom.

See our website at www.mikvatshalom.org to make an appointment.

Gift Certificates are now available.

Susan Lawrence

President Mikvat Shalom

Thomas Mann on Genesis 37:3

by Beth Strassler

37:3 And Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his sons, for a ben-zekunim he was to him; and he made him a ketonet passim

Cohn, Rabbi Reuven Z. 2008-2011.

Mann creates an "I was there" quality of a story that many of us have skimmed for a good part of our lives.

During the spring semester at Hebrew College, I had the privilege of taking a course titled "Reconciliation in the Joseph Narrative" with Rabbi Reuven Cohn, a tremendously knowledgeable and gifted teacher.

Before the class, I had heard the words at the beginning of the story many times: Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph the best for two reasons: 1) because he was Rachel's son and 2) he was a son of his old age (*ben-zekunim*). And he made him a special "coat of many colors". The coat was flashy and his brothers were jealous.

Didn't you always wonder:

"How could Jacob be so blind as to give a beautiful gift to only one son?"

"What exactly about Joseph made Jacob favor him?"

"How was Joseph like Rachel?"

The well known German author, Thomas Mann, reads between the lines and weaves a detailed story to describe how the scenes played out in the family life of Jacob and his sons. Mann's keen observations of human nature and thoughtful attention to detail combine with his extensive research, to create a story of unique depth and understanding. It may be the equivalent of the "movie version" of the story. So then, you already know the interpretation of the story has its critics. Not everyone is convinced that it is better than the original. I was astounded to learn that Mann spent 16 years writing the 1492 page volume (new translation by John E. Woods), completing it in 1942, and persisting through the challenging political climate in Germany, and his emigration to the US, in 1938.

One scene in the book begins on a rainy day, after Jacob has called Joseph to play a board game that he used to play with Rachel, his beloved wife and Joseph's mother. Mann (as narrator) describes the surroundings in Jacob's tent in detail, including the furniture, the wall hangings and the sound of the rain outside. Jacob's conversation reflects on the ways in which Joseph reminds him of Rachel: His game strategies, mannerisms, and general appearance. He shares family stories with Joseph and praises Joseph for his witty conversation. Their intimacy is further evidenced by Joseph reaching for Jacob's hand across

the game table and Jacob taking Joseph's head in his hands to kiss him.

Mann suggests that just as Jacob used to play board games with Yitzchak and Laban (his father and father-in-law) and let them win when he wanted to "butter them up" for something, so now is Joseph using the strategy with his father. Jacob has promised his son a gift, and Joseph is so curious about it, that he presses to hear more. They banter in the manner of "whiny-son-tries-to-get-what-he-wants-from-his-increasingly-annoyed-but-amused-father". It is clear that Joseph is a master at cleverly getting what he wants from his father, and that Jacob either has difficulty refusing him, or prefers to indulge him.

Jacob does not want to give the gift now, in his concern for the other brothers' interpreting the gesture with jealousy. Joseph persists, even appealing to his father's ability to dismiss any jealousy with his superior position as father. He continues to wear down his father, until Jacob agrees to let Joseph see it, marvel at it, then touch it, and finally grab it for himself and put it on. Each step of the way, Joseph coaxes Jacob with clever, witty conversation.

Mann creates an "I was there" quality of a story that many of us have skimmed for a good part of our lives. He provides a sensory experience (seeing the tent, hearing the rain), a sense of intimacy (the touches between the men, the sharing of family history) and a sense of a familiar human interaction (son whining to father to get what he wants). Because the reader knows what is to come, and has the experience of being either child or parent or both, he/she has emotional reactions to the events: "Joseph, stop being a nudge to get the garment right now!" or "Jacob, listen to your instincts! Don't give it to him!"

The reader is drawn into the story, experiences its emotions, and relates to the circumstances. Identifying with either son or father, or both, makes the story personal. As a result, the reader owns the story. It no longer remains a collection of esoteric words with amorphous meaning, but something to grab and hold on to, as part of a tribal and personal history.

Mann, Thomas. (1956) *Joseph and His Brothers* (2005) Translated from the German by John E. Woods. New York: Everyman's Library/Alfred A. Knopf.

Sunday School News

By Denise Hammond

Congregation Etz Chaim is happy to invite you to their monthly Sunday School program.

We meet one Sunday a month (10:00 a.m. - Noon) at the temple to celebrate the Jewish holidays, teach through craft, song and food and enjoy each other's company in a relaxed environment.

Kids enjoy being together and making things, such as their own menorah, learning the story of Passover and making their own Kiddush cups!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Denise Hammond at dghammond@roadrunner.com.

Hebrew School 2012-13

Come one, come all Hebrew Students!
Hebrew School will begin Thursday, October
4th @ 3:45 with our annual Sukkah decorating.

Any questions?

Call David Strassler @ 967-5833.

Sunday School Schedule 2012-13

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Sunday School Dates

October 21st
November 4th
December 2nd
January 13th
February 3
March 3rd
April 7th

Chanukah Party 2012

Mark your calendars now to remember this
event and delicious food, festive music, fun
and dancing!!!

Congregation Etz Chaim's Chanukah Party
will be on Sunday, December 16.

Hebrew School Graduation

By Sarah Beth Campisi

I have been a part of this temple for almost my whole life. Whether it was Saturday morning services, waiting for my brother and sister, or coming to my Hebrew school class, I've always been here.

I remember the year my mom stopped letting me sleep on the pews, or even on her shoulder. To this day I always want to curl up like I once did and fall asleep at some point. Still, I manage to stay awake. I still manage to make Judaism and my congregation a part of my life. No teenage fatigue could stop that, except the few times the couch in the teen room felt too comfy. Sorry about that, Rob.

Congregation Etz Chaim is a part of my heart and mind forever. There were some days that when it was time to walk out the door at four o'clock, I had an inner-teenage meltdown. How could my mom make me do this? All we are going to do is sit and talk about things I already know and read a language I don't understand. Every time I walked in these doors, I regretted thinking like that.

The feeling of family you get when you walk in here is staggering. Everyone has always been there: Beth, David, Maureen, Barbara, Jeff, my mom, and most certainly Rob, the teacher who most recently had to put up with me for three years. All of you have helped me learn about who I am and grow as a person. Any patience I have came from all of you.

I've made so many friends here, some that I hope I keep for a lifetime. Noah, sorry for all the screaming in the car to New York. Thea, I wish we had always been as close as we are now. Amanda, I haven't

known you for long, but our love of Judaism pulled us together. Ivana and Maia, you are the funniest people I've ever known, and you have beautiful smiles. Tara, I've known you since I was a baby, and all the memories we've made from that point on will stick with me forever. Thank you for always being there for me, even when I made you want to pull your hair out (sorry for that).

To all of the younger kids, I know that there's some of you in here that think of Hebrew School as a chore. I know, I've thought that practically every Thursday when I remembered my afternoon wasn't free. But the friends and memories I've made, and the lessons I have learned, outweigh every bad thought. I never thought I would feel so at home besides in my own living room; I found that same feeling here. Hebrew School is one of the most positive things I've ever done in my life. Between the Hanukah parties, Purim celebrations, going to New York City, my Bat Mitzvah, and ordinary classes, I have had the time of my life... and I owe it all to you.

I'm sad to see my last year come and gone after all the good times I have had. I hope to come back and visit everyone on any Thursday I can, starting this fall, because if I lose my connection to this family, I'll truly be lost. Thanks to my friends for sharing laughs, my teachers for sharing knowledge, and my parents sharing the passenger seat of their cars to schlep me back and forth. Without all of you, I could not be the person I am today. Thank you.

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**You could save trees & money by receiving your newsletter & all Jewish community announcements electronically.**  
**Just write to our mail address & ask to "Go Green".**  
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**Samuel Osher
Memorial Library
at Congregation Etz Chaim
Jewish Books, Music & Movies
for the
York County Community**

To donate books call: 967-5833

Hebrew School Happenings

By Jeff Levy

Our Hebrew School has a proud tradition of encouraging Mitzvahs of our students, from raising money for Tzedakah, to the participation in various Mitzvah Projects.

As an instructor of the pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah class at the York County Hebrew school, I have the privilege of working with a bright, enthusiastic group of middle school aged children. It is an enlightening experience, one that I am able to learn and grow from myself. With the guidance of our Education Committee, we put together a curriculum that teaches about Jewish Values and Ethics, as well as the Biblical and Talmudic roots to those ethics. During the past Hebrew School year, we used a book entitled "And You Shall Teach Them Diligently To Your Children..." by Rabbi Steven Bayar. The book is rich with incredible stories of "great people" who perform admirable mitzvahs. Rabbi Bayar breaks Jewish Mitzvahs down into clear categories, such as caring for the poor, honoring the elderly, protecting the earth, respecting the dead, caring for the sick, hospitality and many others.

Our Hebrew School has a proud tradition of encouraging Mitzvahs of our students, from raising money for Tzedakah, to the participation in various Mitzvah Projects. Over the past year, our Gimmel class participated in three Mitzvah Projects. We coordinated a food drive, and brought the bounty we col-

lected to the Biddeford Food Pantry. We put together activity bags (we named them "Distraction Bags"), filled with games, crafts, puzzles, books and toys, for children who find themselves in the emergency room or pediatric Unit of Southern Maine Medical Center. For our final project, which four of our students participated in, we created Biographical Posters for elderly folks who require an assisted living or nursing facility.

The Biographical Poster Project was an enriching experience for those who participated in it, born out of a need expressed by Avis Goodwin. In a conversation with Avis, we discussed how those people entrusted the care of her husband, Albert, did not understand the man they were caring for. Albert was a hard-working man his entire life, who was admired and cherished by his friends, family and co-workers, yet those caring for him only knew him as a frail man who couldn't communicate well. We discussed how it would be so nice if everyone who worked with Albert knew his character, under-



Hebrew School, cont.

By Jeff Levy

stood what a good man he was and the proud dignity that he lived throughout his earlier life. We pondered if he would have been treated differently if the biography of his life was posted on his wall. We considered how people would be more likely to engage him in conversation, and to give him the dignity and respect that he deserved.

It is my hope that the Biographical Poster Project will develop further in future years, enriching the lives of our students, as well as those elders who are the subject of this project. What a nice way to honor the inspiration for this project, Mr. Albert Goodwin.

It is my hope that the Biographical Poster Project will develop further in future years...



Freund, Katherine

With permission from The Giraffe Heroes Project site at www.giraffe.org

Note from Jeff Levy: As part of our Hebrew school class, we often learn about "Mitzvah Heroes". Katherine Freund is a Mitzvah hero from Portland, Maine!

Kathy Freund was still reeling from the early death of her husband when her 3-year-old son was run over by a car. The elderly driver said he hadn't seen the child, who miraculously survived the accident.

Freund saw a much larger problem than her son's injuries: elders needed to be able to get around and some of them were a danger to others when they drove cars. She left her work as a real estate broker and went to graduate school to study ways older people whose reflexes, muscle control or eyesight were failing could maintain their mobility without taking the wheel of a car.

Money was tight, with only her late husband's small insurance policy to cover expenses, but Freund began going to conferences on aging to present her findings. By the time she earned her masters, she had devised a three-part plan for what she named the Independent Transportation Network. ITN would provide elders with workable transportation alternatives, revise public policy on elder drivers, and educate the public about the issue. ITN would provide volunteer drivers who would pick seniors up, deliver them wherever they wanted to go and return them safely home.

Named by the Maine legislature to head a task force on aging drivers, Freund found herself paying all the task force's ex-

penses; there was no operating budget. Despite her careful presentations at national meetings on gerontology and on transportation issues, newspapers reported her work as an attack on the rights of older drivers. Although Freund made it very clear that she wasn't saying elders should be trapped in their homes, many of them were taking her work to mean just that. She was besieged by angry seniors who sent her furious letters, left insulting messages on her answering machine and verbally attacked her in public.

The uproar cost Freund her job as a transportation planner; her boss said she could either be an activist or a planner. She chose activist, continuing her work on ITN. A New York Times column that presented her plan accurately brought in inquiries and support from across the country. "I think this issue touches every home in the United States," Freund says.

ITN today is a much-copied national model that matches volunteer drivers and elders, getting them where they need to go, keeping the roads safe—and forging new friendships. It hasn't been easy getting ITN in place, but Kathy Freund says, "When a task that you feel this strongly about comes along, it feels like it's chosen you more than you've chosen it."



Katherin Freund, photo from The Giraffe Heroes Project site.

New CAJE Conference 2012

By Jeff Levy

In early August Rob Pierce, the teen class teacher, and I journeyed to Montclair State University in New Jersey to participate in the NewCAJE conference. Congregation Etz Chaim has been sending Hebrew School Teachers to CAJE conference for many years, to gain knowledge and inspiration to bring back to our Hebrew School. As a first time attendee, I can tell you that it was a very positive and enriching experience. There were more than 400 Jewish educators from around the country, with the common agenda of providing a Jewish Education to their students that is both engaging and relevant.

The experience of being at a CAJE convention is very unique, being surrounded by Judaism on all sides. Throughout the conference, we could choose to take classes that peak our interests and were relevant to our classroom needs. Each evening, we were entertained by Jewish comedians, story tellers and musicians.

I have to admit, I was somewhat intimidated to be surrounded by such learned individuals. I would guess that there were about 100 rabbis and cantors, and many other full time Jewish educators with incredible resumes. The atmosphere was warm, welcoming and accepting. It was fascinating to me that many people took an interest in our small synagogue, how we engage our students and how we share our Judaism in a place that there are so few. I also found out that we were not alone; there are many other communities with small Hebrew Schools with similar challenges to our own. Rob and I made a nice connection with members of a synagogue in Bangor, Maine, and we

hope to re-connect with them sometime during the year.

The classes that I took were wonderful, and have provided inspiration for many class lessons. I found two instructors particularly interesting.

- Everett Fox is a Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies at Clark University. He is a fascinating speaker, and has translated the five Books of Moses. He led discussions about those “difficult Torah stories” that one might struggle with, stories of seemingly horrible deeds that were done by the Israelites...and how we might teach them to our children.
- The second instructor was Rabbi Steven Bayar, who was the author of our text in last year’s class. His classes talked about creating lessons on Jewish Values and Ethics that can be taught by the use of film, such as Harry Potter and Groundhog Day. He provided me with several ideas that I intend to include in my curriculum.

I would like to thank the Educational Committee for their sponsorship of our trip to the New CAJE conference, as well as their ongoing commitment to our Hebrew School.

There were more than 400 Jewish educators from around the country, with the common agenda of providing a Jewish Education to their students that is both engaging and relevant.

FREE CHILDREN'S BOOK PROGRAM ENTERING ITS THIRD YEAR IN YORK COUNTY

By David Strassler

Congregation Etz Chaim is proud to partner with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation to provide free books to families raising Jewish children (between the ages of 6 months and 8 years) through the PJ Library. At this time, we have 28 children from 21 families enrolled from York County.

Book selections for the PJ Library program are chosen from among the very best of Jewish children's books and music. Compelling stories and captivating illustrations are the hallmarks of PJ Library books. Each book arrives in the subscriber's mailbox monthly, with an accompanying printed reading guide. This guide provides information about Jewish concepts relevant in the book.

You do not need to be a member of Congregation Etz Chaim to join. If you know any families raising Jewish children, who live in York County and might be interested in joining, have them go to the website: <http://www.pjlibrary.org/>

New High Holiday Book

By David Strassler

We are excited to initiate our new High Holiday book: Machzor Eit Ratzon. With its combination of prayer commentary, extensive transliteration and clear layout, our ritual committee expects it to enhance your service experience.

Please support our synagogue by honoring or memorializing someone special to you. Send your donation to Congregation Etz Chaim for \$50 a book.



A Note from the Board

President Emeritus Arnold Shapiro and the entire Board of Directors of Congregation Etz Chaim wish you and your family a healthy, happy and peaceful New Year.



Board of Directors at Congregation Etz Chaim

Jennie Aranovitch
Marc Feldman
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Cynthia Kurtz
Jeff Levy
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Pamela Small Oliver
Sue & Michael Rubin
Arnold & Barbara Shapiro
Jack Schraeter
Beth & David Strassler

Shabbat Services

Join us for Shabbat Services every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month, beginning at 9:30 am

Website:

<http://etzchaimme.org>

Our Synagogue

Our community programs are available to all members of the York County Jewish Community and are driven by the following mission statement:

“We promote Jewish cultural, social, educational and religious activities in southern Maine. Our primary goal is to make available a range of activities that facilitate the expression of what each individual finds valuable in the Jewish experience.

We attempt to accommodate individuals along the entire spectrum of Jewish practice and theology. We value and support the existence of a local formal congregation, but view our community programs as open to all interested people, regardless of whether or to what congregation they may be formally affiliated.”



Etz Chaim photo 2012

York County (YC) Jewish Community

This newsletter is published four or five times each year. It is intended to announce and report on Jewish community events in York County, and especially at Congregation Etz Chaim in Biddeford. It offers local perspectives on historical and contemporary aspects of Jewish life.

Adrienne Levy, Editor & Layout Design Consultant:
Levy family & some Board members
mail@etzchaimme.org

If we have your email address, you have been removed from the snail mailing list.
If you wish to continue to receive a paper newsletter, just write/email us.

“We promote Jewish
cultural, social,
educational and
religious activities in
southern Maine.”

Synagogue Contacts

Please mail Membership dues to:

*PO Box 905,
Kennebunk, ME 04043*

Memorial Plaques, Prayer books, Etz Chaim books of Torah:

David Strassler: 967-5833

Hebrew School/Services: *Beth & David Strassler: 967-5833*

Sunday School: *Denise Hammond: dghammond@roadrunner.com*

Shabbat Potlucks: *Linda: 967-4047*

York County Jewish Community News



Congregation Etz Chaim
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Kennebunk, ME 04043

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