



# Chadashot Ha'am

December 2013

Kislev/Tevet

## A Message from Rabbi Saks

Many of us are familiar with the *midrash*, the rabbinic legend of Abraham setting out from his father Terach's house to found what has come to be the first monotheistic tradition in the world. Before he sets out, according to the *midrash*, Terach asks his son to keep an eye on the store while Terach runs an errand. The store is an idol shop, specializing in statues of a variety of designs which the local people worship. After Terach leaves, Abraham begins to wonder about the power of the idols. When a 50-year-old man wants to purchase a day-old idol, Abraham can't figure out why this adult man would worship something made only a day ago. So, Abraham takes a stick and smashes all but the largest idol. He places the stick in the largest idol's hands and when his father returns, Abraham tells Terach that the biggest idol was jealous and smashed all of the other ones. When Terach insists that's not possible, that it's only a statue with no knowledge, Abraham knows that there is only one God.

Maimonides in *The Guide to the Perplexed* teaches that the original idol worshippers knew that there was only one God. The idol worshippers weren't worshipping the stone statues; they were using them as an intermediary between themselves and God. The idols did not represent God, but



represented the things and people in the world that were liaisons between the people and God. It is because Judaism holds the belief that we do not need an intermediary to reach God that the use of such an intermediary would constitute idolatry.

Unlike other religious traditions, where the clergy is closer to God, more connected to God, or can speak for God, Judaism holds that each of us is equally close to God. The role of the rabbi is primarily as teacher to enable the direct connection between each individual and God. When I lead the congregation in worship, my role is not to represent God, but rather to help each of you connect with God more directly, to remove any sense of a liaison, rather than to create it. Judaism has always employed the use of knowledgeable lay people in the worship process, because each of us has a personal connection to God and can help facilitate that experience for others as well.

The *gabbai* is one of these lay roles in Jewish worship. An Aramaic term, *gabbai* originally meant a tax collector. In the context of worship, a *gabbai* has come to be known specifically as the person who assists with the reading of Torah and as someone who helps to make sure that worship runs smoothly. Many synagogues have ritual committees, but one of the first things that I admired about Bet

Ha'am is that we have a *Gabbai* Committee, a group of individuals invested in the worship process at Bet Ha'am who aid the rabbi in making decisions about worship and finding lay service leaders when needed, among other tasks.

Each of Bet Ha'am's previous rabbis has engaged the *Gabbai* Committee differently. I have come to learn that our *Gabbai* Committee can best serve me and Bet Ha'am by providing space and atmosphere in which we can experiment with different forms of Jewish worship, explore various musical and liturgical settings, and try out new and innovative approaches to Jewish prayer. To achieve this goal, it is my intention to use our *Gabbai* Committee as a laboratory space, one in which we can work together to learn what is possible in Jewish worship and take it for a test drive that allows us to offer reflections and critique. The *Gabbai* Committee welcomes new members and I hope that anyone with an interest or inquisitiveness about Jewish worship will attend our meetings. Our next meeting will be held on Thursday, December 19, at 6:30 PM. I'll include the topic for our meeting in the weekly emails before the meeting and hope that you'll consider joining the group. Together we can deepen our worship at Bet Ha'am and help one another foster a direct connection with God.

## President's Message - Lisa Munderback

Thank you to all of you who shared your thoughts with me through phone calls, emails and face-to-face conversations about my article in the November *Chadashot* regarding clarifying the role of non-Jewish members of Bet Ha'am. It was gratifying that so many of you responded. I realized from these communications that the issue had not been as thoroughly explored through our strategic planning process as I had believed, and I apologize if the proposed policy took you by surprise. It was not the intent of the Board to be divisive. In fact, our Strategic Plan is based on the premise that we want to strengthen our community. It is obvious to me now that more discussion needs to take place before any decision is made on a policy regarding the role of our non-Jewish members. We will take the necessary time, as a congregation, to fully and openly discuss the underlying issues and concerns.

The comments I received were passionate and reflect a wide diversity of opinion. Before we proceed with a specific policy, we all need to hear and explore each other's thoughts, experiences, feelings and ideas. Some of you spoke of family members who do not feel fully welcomed because they were not asked to teach despite their active involvement in Religious School and Bet Ha'am. Others expressed having difficulty understanding why our members who have not - or not yet - chosen to become Jewish would expect to be treated the same as our Jewish members. Some are amenable to having non-Jews serve on the Board, but not as officers. Others are fearful that we will lose what makes us a Jewish religious entity.

Our by-laws indicate that any member in good standing can participate fully in congregational life, and yet we have members who don't feel fully included. We need to examine how to meet our goal to be a welcoming community for all of



our members with our other goals as a Reform Jewish synagogue. One issue we haven't been clear about is who can or cannot serve in leadership positions. I'm sure there are also other concerns. We need to ask to find out what they are. Asking the hard questions will lead us to delve more deeply into who we are and where we want to be as a Reform Jewish synagogue community. We need to do more listening and learning. For now, let's all take a deep breath.

The Executive Committee will be working on a process to engage the congregation in continued dialogue. Our commitment as a Board is to do this in ways that will be respectful of all points of view. This will take some time. I want to assure you that we can and will work this through within our Bet Ha'am community. If you are anxious about how difficult these conversations may be, I hope you will share your feelings with respect, and that others will follow suit.

I encourage you to come with me on this journey. It may be difficult, but I have confidence that we will be a stronger community as a result.

As always, please email me at [lisamunderback@yahoo.com](mailto:lisamunderback@yahoo.com) or call me at 939-1933 to let me know your thoughts.



**Congregation Bet Ha'am**

81 Westbrook Street  
 South Portland, Maine 04106  
 Phone (207) 879-0028  
 Fax (207) 879-1866  
 TTY available  
[www.bethaam.org](http://www.bethaam.org)

**Rabbi Jared Saks**

Orly Mendelson Biggie, Religious School Director  
 Kris Dorer, Executive Director  
 Teri Berenson, Bookkeeper  
 Karen Hindall, Administrative Assistant  
 Chris Skidgel, Custodian

**Executive Committee**

Lisa Munderback, President  
 Andrew Kosak, Vice President  
 Ben Grant, Treasurer  
 Nathan Szanton, Secretary  
 Lisa Pierce, Past President

**Board of Trustees**

Julia Bailin  
 Emily Brocks  
 David Butzel  
 Mylan Cohen  
 Howard Glass  
 Karen Lukas  
 Jeremy Moser  
 Jane Snerson  
 Steve Steinbock  
 Lee Tabenken  
 Deborah Tillman Stone

**Office Hours:**

Tuesday - Friday, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM  
 The office is closed on Mondays.  
 Building Use: All meetings, events or gatherings must be scheduled with the office.

**Office extensions and email addresses:**

Rabbi Saks, Ext. 100  
[ravsaks@bethaam.org](mailto:ravsaks@bethaam.org)  
 Orly Biggie, Religious School Director, Ext. 102  
[orly@bethaam.org](mailto:orly@bethaam.org)  
 Kris Dorer, Executive Director, Ext. 104  
[kris@bethaam.org](mailto:kris@bethaam.org)  
 Teri Berenson, Bookkeeper, Ext. 103  
[teri@bethaam.org](mailto:teri@bethaam.org)  
 Karen Hindall, Administrative Assistant, Ext. 101  
[karen@bethaam.org](mailto:karen@bethaam.org)  
[office@bethaam.org](mailto:office@bethaam.org)

## From the Religious School Director

### Orly Mendelson Biggie



I hope our morning Religious School families are enjoying the *Chanukah* CD by Shira Kline. These songs could brighten any day and will prepare our students and families for Shira's visit on the weekend of January 31-February 2. Thank you to an anonymous donor for making this gift possible.

We have many exciting events coming up! Our 9th Annual Bernstein Scholar-in-Residence Weekend will begin Friday, December 6. Rabbi Nehemia Polen will present a special program for parents, *Raising a Mensch: Transmitting Values & Vision to the Next Generation*, on Sunday, December 8, at 9:45 AM. A *mensch* is a person with integrity and honor. Rabbi Polen will share some refreshing new ideas on how we can help our children become *mensch*es.

On January 10-11, we will have a teen retreat for our seventh through tenth graders at Camp Ketcha in Scarborough. We think our teenagers will be more comfortable with chaperones who are not their parents, so we are reaching out to parents of our younger students and other members to help. There are several shifts available and we can be very flexible. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet and interact with our teens. Please contact me if you have questions or can volunteer.

I hope your family is enjoying many bright lights of *Chanukah*!

## Religious School News

### Thank you

Thank you to last month's substitute teachers: Sarah Szanton, Jane Snerson and Steve Steinbock.

Thank you to Glenn Israel for preparing a delicious dinner for our Sunday evening high school students.

Thank you to Toby Rosenberg for helping our first graders make *Shabbat* candlesticks and for helping our third graders make *chanukiyot*.

Thank you to Deb Stone, Bob Summers and Gretchen Knowlton for wrapping *Chanukah* gifts for our Religious School teachers.

Grades 2A & 2B will participate in the Family Service on Friday, December 13. A potluck *Shabbat* dinner for the students and their families will begin at 5:30 PM. Please RSVP by Friday, December 6.



## Schedule of Services

### Friday, December 6

*Kabbalat Shabbat Service* 7:30 PM

### Saturday, December 7

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

*Parashat Vayigash*

### Friday, December 13

*Family Kabbalat Shabbat* 6:30 PM

### Saturday, December 14

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

*Parashat Vayechi*

### Friday, December 20

*Kabbalat Shabbat Service* 7:30 PM

### Saturday, December 21

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

Rachel Carignan, *Bat Mitzvah*,  
daughter of Mark & Sherri Carignan

*Parashat Shemot*

### Friday, December 27

*Kabbalat Shabbat Service* 7:30 PM

### Saturday, December 28

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

*Parashat Vaera*

**Please join the congregation  
in celebration as Rachel is  
called to the Torah as a  
*Bat Mitzvah*.**

## Executive Director Corner

Kris Dorer



### "Open Doors"

Bet Ha'am's doors are open to all, and it's interesting to note the increasing local and global interest in our synagogue.

For example, we were recently recognized as one of 50 Stunning Synagogues From Around the World by Huffington Post: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/03/50-synagogues-temples-photos\\_n\\_4195093.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/03/50-synagogues-temples-photos_n_4195093.html).

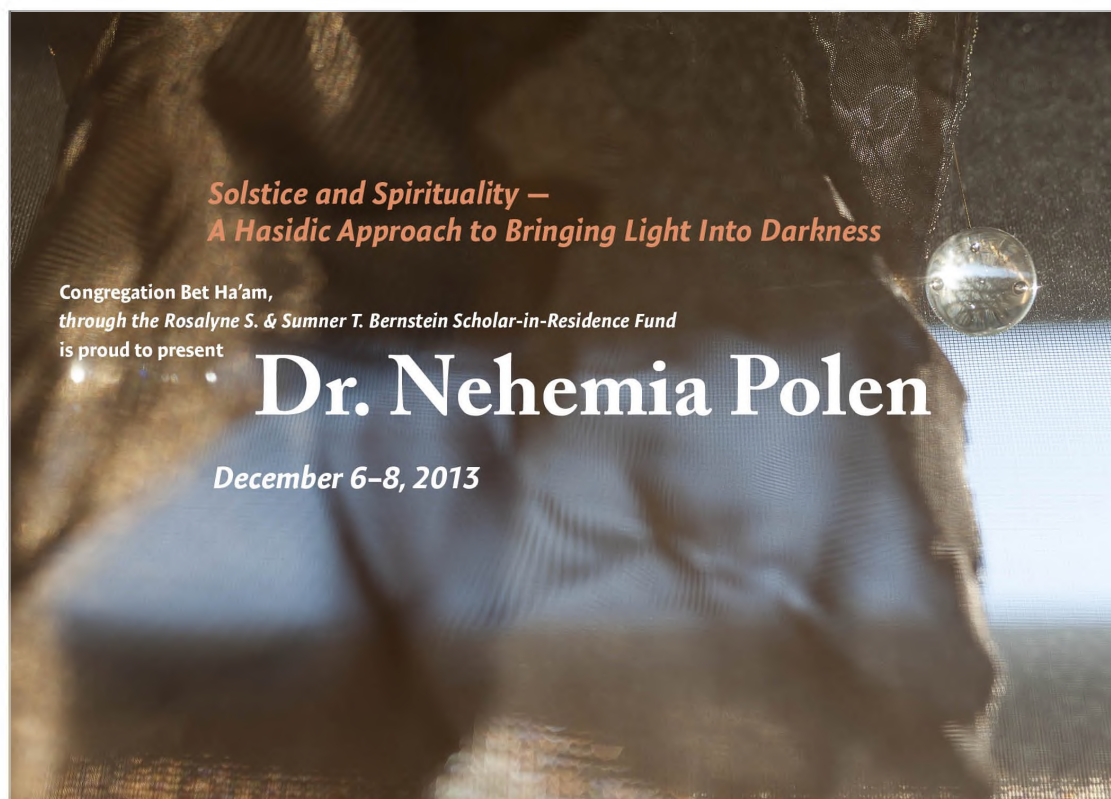
We occasionally have requests for tours or walk-throughs from people who include interested architects, engaged couples planning a wedding, folks driving by who are intrigued by the architecture and folks visiting their hometown who used to attend school in the Religious School building. A perhaps lesser honor came a few years ago when we made a national list of top places for secret skateboarding!

Various groups and organizations are hearing about our beautiful space and have interest in booking events here. All opportunities are considered carefully to ensure that we stay true to our purpose as well as our financial overhead costs. We also think about how we can serve the greater local community. Bookings this past year included day-long corporate events, a weekend bridge tournament and a local police department meeting. Interestingly, we are enjoying so many meetings and events of our own that it can sometimes be a challenge to find available meeting space to welcome these other groups.

Our garden has a growing fan base, as well. Two local churches recently expressed interest in touring the garden and consulting with our committee as they embark on their own community gardens. We even had a call last year from a rabbi in Florida who had heard about our wheat project.

The Bet Ha'am website is becoming an increasingly important resource for people who are visiting or new to the area. When they contact us, we match them up with volunteers to greet them when they visit so that they are personally welcomed and can learn more about Bet Ha'am. The Membership Committee is extending this concept through their SynaGuide program, which connects volunteer congregants with new members in a buddy system.

We continue to promote and welcome the interest in both our facility as well as the unique spark that makes Bet Ha'am such a special place to be.



Please join us for a special weekend of learning and exploration with this year's Bernstein Scholar-In-Residence, Dr. Nehemia Polen.

**Friday, December 6:**  
7:30 PM Shabbat Services

**Saturday, December 7:**  
9:00 AM Torah Study  
10:00 AM Worship Services  
12:00 PM Lunch and Learn

**Sunday, December 8:**  
9:45 AM Workshop

**Call the office at  
879-0028 for details.**

## Adult Library News

Among recent donations to the library are two books by Yiddish maven Michael Wex, *Born to Kvetch* (see Library Committee recommendation below) and *Just Say Nu*.

The library has purchased three books by the Bernstein Scholar-in-Residence Nehemiah Polen:

- *Filling Words with Light: Hasidic and Mystical Reflections on Jewish Prayer*, co-authored with Lawrence Kushner.
- *The Rebbe's Daughter*, the story of Malkah Shapiro who grew up in Poland, the daughter of a noted Hasidic master. This is a rare glimpse of the world of the Hasidic Jew in pre-World War I Eastern Europe.
- *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, a journey into the mind and spirit of a sublime Hasidic master in his moments of joy and tranquility, and later, in his time of personal and communal catastrophe.

These books are also available for sale in the gift shop.

**Thank you** to Susan Cummings-Lawrence, who donated these books on the mikveh:

- *House of Secrets* by Varda Polak-Sahm
- *Taking the Plunge* by Miriam C. Berkowitz
- *Guide My Steps: A Teacher's Guide* by Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh

### Library Committee Recommendations:

*Born to Kvetch* by Michael Wex. An informative and fun book on Yiddish.

*The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* by Richard Zimler. An historical novel and riveting mystery with a focus on the secret Jews, set in 1506 during the Inquisition.

### Library Information

The library is open any time the synagogue is open. It is staffed on Thursdays from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM and on Sundays from 10:00 AM to noon, when there is Religious School.

Feel free to browse, relax or read anytime. However, you must be in our system to borrow books. Look for the clipboard on the reading table and fill out the required information on the clipboard. We will notify you by email when you are all set to borrow books.

To borrow books when the library is not staffed, look for a second clipboard on the reading table and follow the directions. We will notify you by email when your books are due.

The Library Committee generally meets the third Thursday of the month from 10:30 AM to noon. Please contact the office if you are interested in attending a meeting.

## New Vice President

At the Board meeting on November 19, Perry Newman resigned as vice president and from the Board due to an incredible job opportunity. Perry is the new Senior Director, Israel Advocacy Initiatives, at Combined Jewish Philanthropies in Boston. He will be working with business, academic and campus leaders to strengthen the US-Israel partnership. Perry hastened to point out that neither he nor Sharon has any intention of leaving Maine!

*Mazel Tov, Perry!*

The Board elected Andrew Kosak as our new vice president. Thank you, Andrew, for accepting this position. Andrew and his wife, Jennifer, live in Brunswick with their two daughters, Elinore and Maya. Andrew is a teacher at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School and Brunswick Junior High School in Brunswick. He also teaches in our evening Religious School.

*Mazel Tov, Andrew!*

## Winter Coat and Clothing Drive

Bet Ha'am's Social Action Committee is holding its annual winter coat and clothing drive through the end of December. There are many needy families who would be happy to receive coats, hats, mittens, jackets, sweaters and more. Adult and kid sizes are both welcome.

Please drop off clean, gently used winter clothes in the designated box in the lobby.

## Social Action Committee

The Social Action Committee is meeting on Sunday, January 12, at 10:00 AM. Hope to see you there! Please contact Randi Greenwald ([randigreenwald@gmail.com](mailto:randigreenwald@gmail.com)) or Eleanor Goldberg ([egoldbe1@maine.rr.com](mailto:egoldbe1@maine.rr.com)) to learn more about the committee.

## Neighborhood meetings return!

### Sign up now to host Rabbi Saks and your Bet Ha'am neighbors!

Beginning in January and running through May, Rabbi Saks will hold a series of community meetings at Bet Ha'am homes around the region. These meetings will provide opportunities to discuss our Strategic Plan in an informal, intimate setting and to get your input and advice as we move forward together. Based on the feedback from the last round of neighborhood meetings, they will also be a fun way to connect with your Bet Ha'am neighbors!

If you would like to host Rabbi Saks at a gathering in your neighborhood, please contact Andrew Kosak ([andrew.kosak@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.kosak@gmail.com) or 729-0207) with how many people your house can hold and the month you'd be interested in hosting. Meetings will be scheduled during evening hours, and hosts are welcome to provide light refreshments.

We're looking forward to seeing you in the neighborhood soon!!





## Exciting Religious School Activities



### ***Zecher T'zaddik L'vrachah***

- Condolences to Gail Kass & Susan Horowitz on the loss of Gail's sister, Marilyn Kass

### **Welcome New Members**

- Robin Tannenbaum & Peter Burke, Ezra & Fenno
- Hugh Morgenbesser & Amy Colton, Natalie & Julia
- Deborah Klotz
- Jennifer & Peter Segal, Quincy, Charles & Jack
- Michael Levine & MK Spain
- Charlotte Rodetsky

## Join the Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery

We invite you to join the Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery today! We have many needs and many ways for you to contribute. If you have an event you would like to celebrate, a person you would like to honor, a *yahrzeit* to remember, or you just want to help support our programs, please fill out the form and send it along with your check to Bet Ha'am. Include an address if you would like an acknowledgement to be sent.

Our Donor Gallery listing should read:

Please acknowledge to: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Fund choice (please check one):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Annual Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ General Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adult Library Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rabbi Berkowitz Open Door Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Building Capital Campaign
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rabbi Cohen Fund for Worship & Learning
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rabbi Goldfinger Fund for Israel Travel
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lehman Fund for Gardens & Grounds
- \_\_\_\_\_ Religious School Library Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rosalyne S. & Sumner T. Bernstein Scholar in Residence Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rabbi Sandmel Education Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Fund

### ***Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery***

#### **We thank our generous contributors**

##### **Annual Fund**

- Robin Turnbull
- Charlotte Rodetsky

##### **Capital Campaign**

- In memory of Peter Moser, Bain Kittle and Betty Beilstein on their *yahrzeits* by Laura Kittle & Jeremy Moser

##### **General Fund**

- In appreciation of High Holy Days by Leah Neuchiller
- In memory of Sonja Messerschmidt on her *yahrzeit* by Evie & Duane Polisner
- In memory of Saul Polisner on his *yahrzeit* by Duane & Evie Polisner
- With thanks to Perry & Sharon Newman by Emily & Becca Brocks
- In gratitude to Rachel Stamieszkin for her teaching and guidance by Emily & Becca Brocks
- In honor of Emily Brocks becoming *Bat Mitzvah* by Leora Rabin & David Inger
- In appreciation by Jane Sloven & Joe Py
- In honor of Emily Brocks becoming *Bat Mitzvah* by the Lieberman Franz family
- In honor of Emily Brocks becoming *Bat Mitzvah* by Jill & Michael Epstein
- In honor of Emily Brocks becoming *Bat Mitzvah* by Laura Kittle & Jeremy Moser
- In appreciation of Rachel Stamieszkin by Laura Kittle & Jeremy Moser
- In honor of Emily Brocks as she became *Bat Mitzvah* by Asherah Cinnamon
- In memory of Mo Blackman on his *yahrzeit* by Wendy & Bill Sirois
- In honor of Emily Brocks becoming *Bat Mitzvah* by Julia & Dan Bailin

- In appreciation by an anonymous donor
- In loving memory of Michael Barriault by Toby Rosenberg
- Andrew & Jennifer Kosak
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Michael Kleinman
- In honor of Emily Brocks as she became *Bat Mitzvah* by Jerri & David Donn
- In appreciation of Rabbi Saks and Rosie Wohl and their support by Maxine Farber
- Dan Rose
- In memory of sister, Sheila Ravitch Giltitz, by Lee & Jamie Broder
- In memory of Howard Lemack by Jarod & Jennifer Harriman

##### **Rabbi's Discretionary Fund**

- In appreciation of High Holy Days by Jane & Ken Brodsky
- In appreciation of Rabbi Saks on the occasion of our marriage by Pam Remy & Karen Weiss
- With thanks to Rabbi Saks by Emily & Becca Brocks
- In appreciation of my High Holy Day honor by Annette Goodman
- Teri & Allen McRae

##### **Rabbi Sandmel Education Fund**

- In honor of Emily Brocks becoming *Bat Mitzvah* by Orly Biggie

##### **Rabbi Berkowitz Open Door Fund**

- In appreciation of Rabbi Saks, Lisa Munderback and the Holiday Committee for our welcoming High Holy Day services by Jeremy Moser & Laura Kittle



# December 2013

Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b> Office Closed	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM	<b>5</b> Library Committee 10:30 AM Library Volunteers 11:00 AM Committee Chairs Check-in Meeting 6:30 PM	<b>6</b> <i>Bernstein Scholar-in-Residence Weekend</i>  <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 7:30 PM	<b>7</b> <i>Bernstein Scholar-in-Residence Weekend</i> Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM
<b>8</b> <i>Bernstein Scholar-in-Residence Weekend</i> Religious School Grades K-6 9:00 AM Grades 7-10 5:00 PM Basic Adult Hebrew 5:30 PM	<b>9</b> Office Closed	<b>10</b> Finance Committee 10:00 AM	<b>11</b> Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM  Education Committee 6:30 PM	<b>12</b> Library Volunteers 11:00 AM  Adult Learning Committee 6:30 PM	<b>13</b> Grade 2 <i>Shabbat</i> Dinner 5:30 PM  Family <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> 6:30 PM	<b>14</b> Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM
<b>15</b> Religious School Grades 1-6 9:00 AM Grades 7-12 5:00 PM Basic Adult Hebrew 5:30 PM	<b>16</b> Office Closed	<b>17</b> Garden Committee 5:30 PM Board Meeting 6:30 PM	<b>18</b> Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM School Change Task Force 6:30 PM	<b>19</b> Library Volunteers 11:00 AM <i>Gabbai</i> Committee 6:30 PM	<b>20</b> Nominating Committee 12:00 noon  <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 7:30 PM	<b>21</b> Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM Rachel Carignan <i>Bat Mitzvah</i>
<b>22</b> No Religious School	<b>23</b> Office Closed  Membership Committee 7:00 PM	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM  Office Closed	<b>26</b> Library Volunteers 11:00 AM	<b>27</b> <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 7:30 PM	<b>28</b> Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM
<b>29</b> No Religious School	<b>30</b> Office Closed	<b>31</b>				