



September 2018/Tishrei 5779

Dear Friends of Jewish Life in Maine,

This past July, Leora Kling Perkins, a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, her husband Matt, and I stood around a 100-year-old Torah scroll in the basement of Beth Israel Congregation in Waterville. The Torah had been brought to Beth Israel from Lithuania, and the stitching between two of the panels had come loose. Leora had noticed this problem as we prepared for the Maine Conference for Jewish Life, and ordered *gid*, or traditional thread, from a scribe in Manhattan. The night before Leora left Waterville, the three of us Skyped the scribe, who instructed us how to remove the old *gid* and replace it with newer, more supple fiber. It was an empowering and surprisingly spiritual experience. When we were done, Matt asked the *sofer*,

Is the old *gid* still holy?

Yes, the *sofer* replied. It must be buried.

Almost out of instinct, I told Matt and Leora that they should bring it back to New York to be placed in a proper *geniza*, where the names of God and holy objects are buried according to traditional Jewish law.

And then I remembered I was performing two funerals in the next week. So instead, I kept the thread in my backpack, and gave pieces of it to the two grieving mid-Maine families. The thread that connected the pages of our Torah, and Beth Israel, to its Lithuanian past, was buried in Canaan, Maine and Portland, Maine. Wisdom from New York and passion from Maine, the visionary enthusiasm of youth with the solemn commitment of previous generations, the timelessness of Torah with the finality of human life all of these were woven together in a moment. Moments and relationships like these, however, were made possible by years of dreaming, labor, and investment from the Center for Small Town Jewish Life at Colby College.

With the support of a Covenant Signature Grant, the Estate of Shirley Liebowitz, and the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Center had the ability to bring up a rabbinic intern this summer to serve the Jewish communities of central Maine. This September, we are welcoming our first three year-long interns, representing the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements, to Augusta, Waterville, and Bath. These students will not only bring their talents and enthusiasm for Jewish life to our small synagogues and Hillels, but they will also learn about how we have kept Jewish life alive in our state for over 100 years through dedication, hard work, and innovation. The Torah of Maine will not only be enriched by these students, but also spread beyond the borders of our state.

The new rabbinical student program is just one of our recent initiatives strengthening Jewish life in Maine and animating our core values: ensuring equal access to superlative Jewish education; cultivating multigenerational community through Jewish life and learning; and supporting small Jewish communities in fulfilling their missions.

In order to continue this work, we need your help. Your support empowers us to continue serving every Hillel student engaged in multigenerational learning with their local synagogue, every Maine kid inspired to learn more Hebrew at Funtensive, every young adult who finds community in our emerging teen program, and every life-long learner who connects with a world-class scholar. Your support guarantees that the jewels of the Jewish tradition are available to all, regardless of geographic location or economic status. Your support ensures that our heroic, small synagogues do not journey alone, but thrive as part of a larger Jewish community.

To support our work by donating online, please follow this link and choose Center for Small Town Jewish Life in the drop-down menu.

<http://www.colby.edu/jewishlife/support/>

As we enter this new Jewish year, we ask that you remain connected to our Maine Jewish family, providing it the support it needs to thrive, create, and inspire other small Jewish communities nationally. The threads that tie us to one another and stitch the wisdom of our past to the promise of our future make our families stronger and our communities richer. The Torah of Maine has something to teach us all. Pick up the thread, and share the greatest gifts of Jewish civilization.

LShanah Tovah UMitukah mMaine!


A Good and Sweet New Year from Maine!


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