

The Star

Bi-monthly newsletter from
Congregation Beth Elohim
in Acton, Massachusetts



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In this issue...

Incredible as it may seem — yes, it is September! Our Facebook feeds attest to the return of kids to school. And the humming of our busy staff at CBE tells us that the High Holidays are fast approaching. And yet — our wonderful staff made time to appear in this issue of The Star. Thanks to Rabbi David for his wonderful piece on Mayyim Hayyim and to our new ELC director and administrator for taking to meet with us. Our friends from the village of Chelm never disappoint -- and we celebrate a wedding! L'Shanah tovah!

Message from Our Rabbi



Fellow congregants –

Recently, I heard the phrase “Life moves at the speed of relationships,” meaning the quality and depth of our relationships can accelerate our personal growth and strengthen the quality of our community. This also applies to organizations, particularly religious ones. Here in the Greater Boston Area Jewish community, we are fortunate to live in an area with a constellation of Jewish organizations that greatly enhance Jewish life. I want to talk to you about one that we, as CBE, serve as community partners. We do so not just for the benefit of our members, but because supporting the work of this organization greatly enhances our Jewish community. [Mayyim Hayyim](#), a community *mikveh* and learning center in Newton that opened in 2004. A mikveh, or ritual bath, contains both filtered water and natural water, such as rain, which makes the pool *mayyim hayyim* or “Living Waters.” Traditionally, the mikveh has been used by married women after completing their monthly period, or for individuals converting to Judaism. Religious men would also immerse before Shabbat or holy days. The mikveh in the post-war period gained a bad reputation as uninviting and degrading places, especially for women and people converting to Judaism. It was a ritual badly in need of updating.

When Naomi and I arrived in the Boston area in 2003, I wanted to immerse in a *mikveh* before our wedding. I found one on Beacon Street in Brookline. It was hidden behind the kitchen in an Orthodox synagogue. There was no greeter. A note said to put a donation in the *pushke* (*Tzedakah box*). There was no real changing area, and the one or two benches had signs that said, “Area for Rebbe only!” I can’t say this was a particularly welcoming experience. Fortunately, I brought a towel as none were provided.

At the time, most non-Orthodox conversions took place in Sharon, at a tiny *mikveh* with no waiting area. Usually, rabbis organize a few immersions in a row. In Sharon, candidates for conversion had to wait in their cars with their families and friends. After they dunked and changed, there was no room for ritual or celebration. I recently assisted with a conversion at

the Sharon mikveh, which now has a new lobby and other updates. It's nicer than it was but still doesn't compare with Mayyim Hayyim.

In 2004, Mayyim Hayyim opened and welcomed all Jews. Most still come to immerse because of the laws of marital purity, but now all partners of all genders are welcome. Conversions also make up a large number of the 1600 immersions they provide each year. Traditional mikvehs often will only permit Orthodox conversions to take place. Mayyim Hayyim welcomes rabbis of all streams to bring their conversion candidates. I have personally participated in over 500 conversion immersions at Mayyim Hayyim. Candidates are welcome to a beautiful lobby. In place of a gaudy pink and fuchsia interior common in many *mikvaot* was an updated, modern facility with gender-neutral colors. Mayyim Hayyim also serves as an gallery and always has art on display. The two actual pools are warm and inviting. High windows and skylights provide both natural light and privacy.

Below, one of the two mikveh pools at Mayyim Hayyim.



There is a room for the rabbis to meet with candidates to discuss their Jewish journeys. After our meeting, a trained guide would take the candidate to a fully stocked changing room with a shower and facilities – and plenty of towels. They would be buzzed into the room. A guide needs to be in the room to witness a conversion immersion, and the *mikveh* guides take steps to assure privacy, including holding up a towel until the candidate is covered by the water. Mayyim Hayyim also works with candidates to make sure the guide is gender appropriate and has worked with many LGBTQ+ conversion candidates with sensitivity and respect.

After candidates immerse, be they children or adults, we hold a welcoming ritual and blessing in the lobby or celebration room. Often wrapped in a tallit, these moments can be very emotional, and there often isn't a dry eye in the room. On many occasions, we will make a *L'Hayyim* toast and have a small reception. When the candidates leave, Mayyim Hayyim

gives them a small gift, honey sticks and Shabbat candles to use on the first Shabbat that they are officially Jewish.

People immerse for many reasons beyond conversion. Mayyim Hayyim a collection of rituals for those immersing for a variety of reasons, such as anticipating or recovering from surgery, leaving a relationship, embarking on a new career path, or to mark a special birthday. They have taken an ancient ritual, revived and expanded it, and made it accessible to many more people.

CBE pays an annual fee to be a community partner of Mayyim Hayyim. Besides supporting their important work, we receive a few immersion certificates and an educational program. We have brought both adult groups and our 6th-grade families to these programs. For many of our young families, it is their first visit to a *mikveh*. The visit is a big hit with our 6th graders, who often say that the program brings them closer to their parents and their Jewish heritage. Many students ask their parents to reserve a pre-*B'nai mitzvah* immersion for them. It's hard to believe, but two pools of water and an educational center have had a profoundly positive impact on the Jewish community not only in Boston, but in many areas where mikvaot have been established on the model of welcoming and expansiveness of Mayyim Hayyim.

L'Shanah tovah,
Rabbi David

P.S. Currently on exhibit in the Mayyim Hayyim gallery is [*Irma G: A Century of Hats and Spirit*](#) — seventeen photographs created by CBE's former Education Director Leann Shamash and her 96-year-old mother Irma Gershkowitz before her passing in January of 2020. The exhibit runs through December 20, and there will be an artist's talk on September 18 at 7:30 pm.

Welcome Back!

We visited CBE last week and found everyone gearing up for the High Holidays and the beginning of the school year. At right, CBE administrator Miriam Beit Aharon with her ever-welcoming smile. Morah Bryna Klevan gets her classroom ready with the help of madricha Abby Hirschberg. And a meeting with Miriam, Jaymi Formaggio and Cantor Sarra.





Meet Our New ELC Director and Administrator!



This summer we were excited to welcome a new director and administrator at our beloved ELC (Early Learning Center). At left is Tori Morriseau, our new ELC administrator -- and at right is Lyle Keleher, our new ELC director. What's really exciting is that they worked together at another early childhood center -- and discovered an immediate synergy and comraderie there. After Lyle came on board with us in July, we learned that we would need a new administrator as well. Lyle reached out to Tori, who lost no time in joining us as well. We welcome this dynamic duo with open arms --

they've already shown that their love for our kids and excitement for our school is beyond limits! We asked them to tell us a little about themselves; answers below.



Lyle Keleher, ELC Director

Tell us about your personal journey to CBE. What did you do before coming here and how did it lead you to us?

I always knew from an early age that I was going to work with young children. I used to babysit all the kids in the neighborhood. They are all adults now with their own kids! And I used to play school with my friends and family. When I graduated high school I decided to attend a 2 year program compacted into a year and a half.

I am a firm believer in life long learning. I've been working in the early childhood education field for 40 years. I absolutely love what I do! The fact that CBE ELC is a Jewish center appealed to me because it offers me a new opportunity to learn new things.

What else would you like the CBE community to know about you?

I have been married for 25 years. My husband and I share 3 children. All grown now. I have 2 grandchildren! They are such a joy to me!

In my spare time I love to bake, and read, and my husband and I love to hike and travel. .

Do you have any hopes or special plans for the coming year?

I'm looking forward to the upcoming year at ELC because this center is rich in history which makes me excited to bring fresh ideas and fresh perspectives to help get the ELC back to its former glory with a waitlist!

Lyle, with longtime ELC teacher Namita Chaudhuri, and enjoying a spectacular late summer afternoon with two of her students.





Tori Morriseau, ELC Administrator

Tell us about your personal journey to CBE. What did you do before coming here and how did it lead you to us?

I have been working in Early Education since 2014. I took time off in the fall of 2023 to go across country with my fiancé for his over the road delivery job. We were based out of Texas and we were able to explore most of the mid west. May of 2024 we moved back to Massachusetts where I found the job as a preschool teacher at the center Lyle was working at as Director. We instantly hit it off like we had been friends for 20 years. After being there about a year and a half, Lyle had moved on from that center. She called me one day and told me she started working at CBE ELC and needed an Admin to start soon. No questions asked I respectfully put in my notice and told Lyle I would be there soon. It was the best decision I have made and love my new Family at CBE ELC.

What else would you like the CBE community to know about you?

I have a background in Graphic Design, I absolutely love what I do and I could not picture doing anything else as a career. It truly brings me joy to watch the children grow and learn.

Do you have any hopes or special plans for the coming year?

I hope that we continue to move forward and grow our ELC family.

Tori uses her impressive design skills to provide wonderful graphics across the ELC. In the first photo, she shows us an example of the signs she has created to hang outside the doorways of each classroom and office to introducing each of our staff. In the second photo, Tori shows some of her graphically-rich signage — conveying messages with warmth and color — not to mention making them helpful to pre-readers!



Lyle and Tori love meeting new people and showing them around the ELC. Feel free to contact them with any questions or to arrange a visit at elcdirector@bethelohim.org (Lyle) and elcadmin@bethelohim.org (Tori).

The People of Chelm Want to Know...



Illustration by Maurice Sendak.

For years the “People of Chelm” column has challenged The Star readers with questions drawn from the long and rich history of Jews and Judaism. We are delighted to continue this tradition, with abundant thanks to Bob Ferrara and Waky.

The High Holidays will be here soon! With the coming of Rosh Hashanah, we have a special opportunity for reassessment and reflection, a time for questioning and judging our behavior and the direction of our lives. Jewish thinkers, teachers, and students have given these issues an enormous amount of thought over past millennia. Yet – as the question below notes – the Torah does not say much about Rosh Hashanah.

QUESTION:

This year Rosh Hashanah arrives on a particularly auspicious date – the same day as the Autumnal Equinox, September 22! While the celebration of Rosh Hashanah has many facets, the most important of which are that it presents a time to remember, to reflect and reassess, to renew one’s life, and to look forward. Surprisingly the Torah does not explicitly require much. There is but one negative (“do not”) mitzvah regarding Rosh Hashanah. In Leviticus 23:24–25, we are told “you shall observe complete rest.... you shall not work at your occupation”. Similar injunctions of course hold for other holidays. There is also only positive (“do”) mitzvah required on Rosh Hashanah. What is this one thing that the Bible commands to be done? It certainly makes for a noisier holiday.

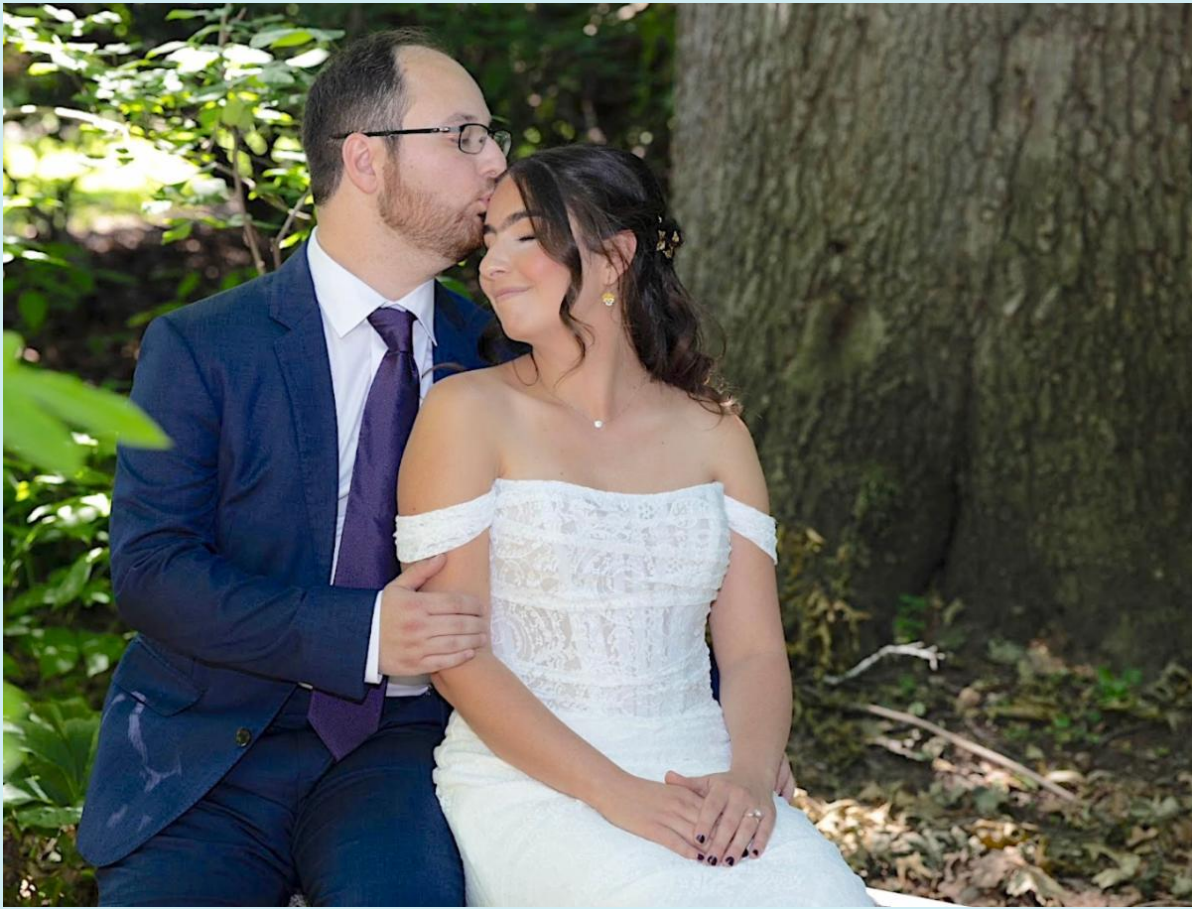
Ponder your responses – and find the answers below.

Kvell Korner — Looking for Your News!!!

We are truly blessed to share in the simchas of our CBE families!

Wedding of Matty Linden & Luby Kiriakidi

Wendy and Jon Linden are happy to share that their son Matt(y) Linden married Luby Kiriakidi on June 29 in Rochester, NY, with guests from four months to 93 years old in attendance. Highlights included eight blessings in different languages in addition to the traditional sheva brachot, the groom reciting part of his vows in Russian (the bride’s birth language), Greek dancing in addition to the hora, and the most delicious Ukrainian honey cake!



Have a simcha to share? Write to communications@bethelohim.org and we will include it in our next issue!

What's happening at CBE this month?

Visit our [online calendar](#) for up-to-the-minute programming.

Donations

The congregation thanks our members, their relatives and friends, and the larger community for recent donations to CBE either online or by check. If you do not see your donation, please look for it in our next donations email or issue of *The Star*, or contact communications@bethelohim.org.

Adult Education Fund

Beth Schrager & Jeffrey Handler / In honor of Matt Leibman for all he has done for the congregation

Amy Naparstek Israel Scholarship Fund

Andrea Harris / In loving memory of Amy Sara Naparstek

David & Chips Naparstek / In honor of Linda & Denis Friedman on the occasion of their

anniversary

General Fund

Beth Schrager & Jeffrey Handler / In memory of Allan Krueger

Kathie & Bob Becker / In memory of Dana Merrill

Kathie & Bob Becker / In memory of David Yacuoby

Kathie & Bob Becker / In memory of Eric Bergeron

Kathie & Bob Becker / In memory of Noel Coletti

Kathie & Bob Becker / In memory of Robert Block

Kathie & Bob Becker / In memory of Jean Livingston on the occasion of his Yahrzeit

Thomas Smith / In honor of grandson Aidin's baby naming

High Holiday Appeal

Joel & Marjorie Friedman

Iris & Gerson Stutman Memorial Beautification Fund

Phyllis & Ed Aaronson

Rabbi Lewis Mintz Fund

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Dan's Grandpa Louie

The People of Chelm Want to Know...

ANSWER TO QUESTION POSED ABOVE:

For Rosh Hashanah, the only positive commandment is that the shofar be blown. The first verse of Numbers 29 repeats the injunction of Leviticus 23:24–25 against normal work on this day and then commands “you shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded”. But there is one important exception; shofar blowing is not performed when Rosh Hashanah occurs on a Sabbath. Fortunately, this is not the case in 2025. So Beth Elohim congregants and friends will be happy to hear from the local shofar blowers at our synagogue. Thanks to them and all the others around the world for this mitzvah!

Resources

CBE's [Chesed Committee](#) | Contact us in a time of need

[18 Doors](#) (formerly InterfaithFamily of Greater Boston)

[Anti-Defamation League incident reporting](#)

[CJP \(Combined Jewish Philanthropies\)](#)

[CJP SeniorDirect](#)

[Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life](#)

[Hadassah of Nashoba Valley Facebook](#)

[Hebrew College events](#)

[Jewish Bereavement Support Group](#)

JewishBoston.com

[Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston](#)

[Jewish Family Service of Metrowest](#)

[Keshet](#) | A national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life

[Mayyim Hayyim | Living Waters Community Mikveh](#)

[Oneinfifty.org](#) | BRCA awareness, education, and support

[Yad Chessed](#) | Emergency financial assistance to Jewish individuals and families in need

[Yerusha.com](#) | A Website for Older Childless Jews

Visit the [Resources](#) page on our website for our complete resource list.

Feedback/get in touch with us!

Let us know what you think! What do you like or not like about our format or content? If there is someone or some effort or group you'd like to see featured, please write to communications@bethelohim.org.

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