

# The Star

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



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## January/February 2024 • Tevet/Shevat 5784

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## In this issue...

*When January first dawned this past Monday, it seemed as if we all opened our eyes with a fervent prayer: "May 2024 be a better year!" With that in mind, we hope that this newsletter will play a part in restoring hope, wonder and joy. We recall our wonderful community with words from our co-presidents, learn a few new ways to think about and celebrate our planet on the holiday of Tu B'shvat, get more familiar with a couple of cool volunteers, visit our Early Learning Center — and share a few amazing simchas. In honor of MLK Jr. Day, read the People in Chelm Want to Know column to learn about the role that Jews played in the civil rights movement. And, last of all, don't leave without participating in The Star's 2-minute survey to tell us how we've been doing.*

## Message From Our Co-Presidents



Happy 2024 to all in our CBE family. As we move away from the darkest days of winter and

into the longer, light-filled weeks to come, we are reminded of the light that brightened our December as the lights of the menorah shined in our homes, at CBE and at town menorah lightings in the many towns represented by members of our congregations. It has been a dark period for the Jewish people, faced with the aftermath of the October 7th massacre in Israel and an over 300% increase in antisemitism here in the US in the past months. We have felt this hit home as college students have had to navigate challenging atmospheres on campuses and many Jews around the world have faced verbal and physical harassment in the streets, in their homes, and workplaces. There was a glimmer of light when many hostages were released from the hands of Hamas in November, only to be followed by deep concern for those still in captivity. One friend commented at Chanukah that the miracle is not that the oil lasted for 8 nights, but that we, the Jewish people, have lasted for thousands of years and continue to thrive.

At CBE we are blessed to have a lively and thriving community – our youngest children learning through play at the ELC, religious school students finding faith, friends and connection, adults participating in the many religious, educational and social offerings of the synagogue, people who truly care about each other and find many ways to connect. May the love and strength in our community, one CBE, *Kehilah Achat*, continue to thrive and may we all continue to find support with each other during these challenging times.

We look forward to a 2024 filled with joyful celebration of community. Stay tuned for programming this winter and spring including a Tu B'Shvat celebration, Israel related programming offered by the Adult Education committee, social events offered by Brotherhood and Sisterhood, information about proposed CBE constitution updates to move CBE into our next phase and an exciting auction fundraiser.

As always don't hesitate to reach out to us with questions, feedback, or just to say hello.

Laura Kelmar and Lindsay Rosenman  
CBE Co-Presidents  
[president@bethelohim.org](mailto:president@bethelohim.org)

## So Many Ways to Celebrate Tu B'shvat!

by Jess Rosenblatt, CBE Ritual Chair

This year, Tu B'shvat (the 15th of Shevat) begins at sundown on Wednesday, January 24. This is the date on the Jewish calendar that marks the birthday of the trees. This was important in ancient times for Jewish farmers to follow laws regarding fruit harvests. In the medieval period a mystical interpretation of the holiday emerged, along with the practice of holding a Tu B'shvat seder and enjoying symbolic fruit and other produce from the Land of Israel. In modern times Tu B'shvat has also become associated with stewardship of the natural environment of Israel, and with environmentalism more broadly. (You can learn more about Tu B'shvat at [My Jewish Learning](#).)



*Jess Rosenblatt and son Aaron with fruit tasting plates for Tu B'shvat*

The many layers of Tu B'shvat's history give us a holiday that has something for everyone, speaks to all ages, and that can be observed with simple actions or detailed celebrations. I asked a few members of the CBE community to share about different aspects of the holiday

that they find meaningful.

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## Miriam Beit Aharon — Tu B'shvat Food & Family

### How has Tu B'shvat been meaningful to you to celebrate when you were a child or now with children as an adult?

Growing up I never celebrated Tu B'Shvat, it was only mentioned in passing, and I assumed it was a minor holiday. It never made sense to my mother, born and raised here in New England, to talk about trees in the winter. My father, having grown up in a secular Israeli family in Israel, didn't know how to bring it to this new environment. I, however, was always made familiar with the natural cycles in Israel and local flavors sites and sounds through frequent visits to my family there. Now as an adult it has been a way to introduce my stepdaughter to those sensory experiences that have been foundational to my own personal Jewish identity, when I cannot provide her with an in-person Israel experience for a very long time for many reasons.

### Have you found any engaging Tu B'shvat activities for younger children?

With my stepdaughter we had a wonderful time using small glass bowls to have samples of each of the [seven species](#), in the style of a seder plate, with just enough of each kind of food for us each to have a taste at the beginning of dinner. It was really fun to try each one together and learn who likes each one and who doesn't. It was a seder plate that allowed for a little more concrete hands-on interaction than the Passover one.



If allergies are an issue, I suggest everyone keep in mind that this holiday is here to serve us, and as such it can be adapted as much as needed to our individual needs. You don't have to give up on this fun mystical holiday because it's traditional to eat nuts, or if raw or dried fruit isn't a good option for your family's health. Feel free to substitute, or delve into the mystical side of the holiday and reimagine a meaningful observance that works for you.

### Additional Resources

[\*PJ Library Tu B'shvat Activities for Kids\*](#)

[\*PJ Library Tu B'shvat Seder for Kids\*](#)

[\*Seven Species Recipes\*](#)

[\*Tu B'shvat Allergy Aware Suggestions\*](#)

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## Cantor Sarra Spierer — Tu B'shvat Mysticism & Mindfulness

### What are some mystical aspects of Tu B'shvat that have been meaningful to you?

On a mystical level, I think Tu B'shvat is about healing ourselves and the world around us by connecting deeply with nature and growing in consciousness. Each of the fruits and nuts on the Tu B'shvat menu symbolize a part of us and the way we relate to the world. I love how eating and reflecting on these Tu B'shvat foods can be a very physical, sensory (and delicious) meditation

that encourages us to open our hearts and make room for the light.



**What are some examples of mystical reflections, prayers, or experiences that you have done to observe Tu B'shvat?**

The practice of *hitbodedut* – talking aloud to God, like a best friend – was made popular by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov a couple of centuries ago. It can be done anytime and anywhere, but it is especially powerful during Tu B'shvat to do this practice walking outdoors among the trees and plants, as it was originally intended. There is a beautiful song ("[You Are the One](#)" by Debbie Friedman) that describes this experience of connecting to God, in nature, in a very moving way.

#### **Additional Resources**

*[Modern Mystical Tu B'shvat Haggadah](#) by Juliette Hirt*

*[First known Tu B'shvat seder materials](#) from the 17th Century*

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#### **Leslie Knight – Tu B'shvat Environmentalism & Israel**

**How is Tu B'shvat meaningful to you from an environmental perspective?**

*Shmirat Ha'adamah* (guarding the Earth) is a core Jewish value, and we are reminded of this on several Jewish holidays. On Sukkot we are reminded of our connection to the Earth by celebrating the harvest, and our Pesach seder plates have symbols of the spring season, like eggs and parsley. Tu B'shvat is another connection between Judaism and the Earth, by celebrating the "birthday of the trees". Here in Massachusetts the trees are not yet budding, so on Tu B'shvat we are not only reminded of our connection to the Earth in general, but also to the land specifically in Israel.



**What are some examples of environmental actions or experiences that you have done to observe Tu B'shvat?**

As a kid we always raised money to plant trees in Israel, usually in honor or memory of someone else. At our CBE Tu B'shvat program this year on January 28 we will have a representative of Jewish National Fund (JNF) here at CBE to share more information about planting trees in Israel. I also appreciate the opportunity to eat fruits we don't normally eat as a reminder of our connection to and appreciation of what nature provides.

**Additional Resources**

[Environmental Tu B'shvat Haggadot](#) from Hazon

[Environmental Tu B'shvat Haggadah](#) from the Reform Movement & NFTY

[Plant Trees in Israel](#) through JNF

[Plant Two Trees for Justice](#) through T'ruah

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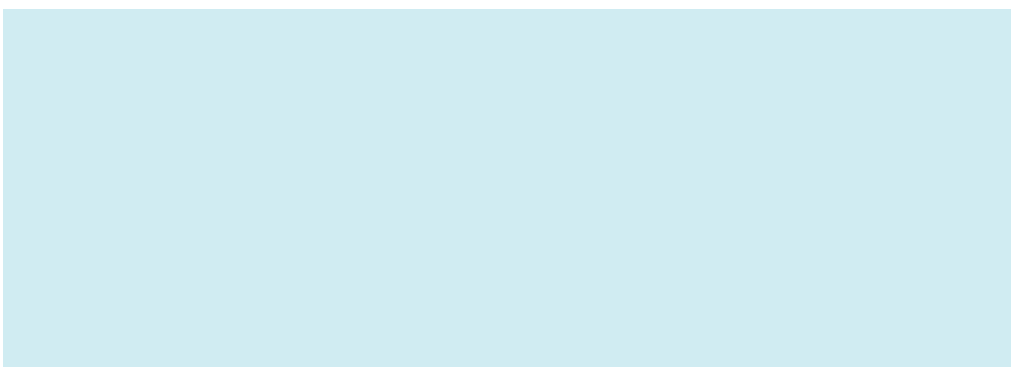
**In closing —**

I hope these stories and resources help you find a meaningful way to observe Tu B'shvat this year. Please feel free to share your Tu B'shvat experiences with me at [ritual@bethelohim.org](mailto:ritual@bethelohim.org) – I would love to know how your holiday went!

Jess Rosenblatt

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## On Being a Volunteer at CBE — With Danya Bloomstone and Michelle Siegert





*Danya Bloomstone (left) and Michelle Siegert are long-time members of CBE, and their volunteering has only grown over the years. We asked them to tell us about it.*

**Danya:**

**What was your last volunteer position?**

Prior to co-chairing the rabbi search committee and planning Rabbi David's installation with Michelle Siegert, I was a member at large on the CBE board and worked with Bob Ferrara on volunteer engagement.

**How long have you been a CBE member?**

I have been a member of CBE since 1996.

**When did you first volunteer for the synagogue? What made you decide to take on this job?**

My first experience volunteering for the synagogue was on the school committee. A friend of mine nominated me and I had 2 children in the school, so I agreed to participate.

**What other roles have you had at CBE?**

After my first year on the school committee, I became the chair of the school committee for a few years, and then advanced to co-VP of Education for a couple of terms. I also participated in the very first Purim Shpiel and continued for 5 or so years thereafter.

**What have been the most memorable or rewarding experiences doing this volunteer role?**

The most memorable and rewarding part of co-chairing the search committee was the committee itself. We had an amazing group of smart, creative, committed individuals who worked really well together. Each brought something a bit different to the group which made for very thoughtful, interesting and productive discussion and decision making.

**What are you most proud of accomplishing as a CBE as a volunteer?**

I am proud to do my part to keep CBE going and moving forward. With respect to my volunteer work, I am most proud of two things - one was a bust and one was not. The first was creating a joint high school program with Kerem Shalom in Concord (that only lasted one term). It was not very successful but for me it was a great example of collaboration and out of the box thinking. The second thing I am proud of is the organized and inclusive way we conducted the rabbi search process and of course its outcome.

**What is one of your biggest takeaways from your volunteer experience?**

One of my biggest takeaways is that volunteering can work very well when it is contained, with a clear purpose and end point and when you share the task with a friend or fellow congregant; while it can be a lot of work, it feels really good to share the load and work together to do something that helps the community.

**What would you like congregants to know about volunteering at CBE?**

There are so many ways to help CBE - big and small. If you have something you like to do, there is almost certainly a way to apply it to help CBE. Volunteering is a great way to get to know people and as you get to know more people, coming to synagogue becomes more inviting and comfortable and fulfilling.

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**Michelle:**

**What was your last volunteer position?**

My last formal volunteer position was co-coordinating the Rabbi's installation with Danya Bloomstone

**How long have you been a CBE member?**

Our family has been a member at CBE since 1997, so that would be 26 years!

**When did you first volunteer for the synagogue? What made you decide to take on this job?**

The first time I volunteered at CBE (that I can remember!) was as a member of Sisterhood. I spent a shift or two gift wrapping at Barnes & Noble at holiday time (and as a result, met one of my best friends). I decided to volunteer in this capacity as I worked full time and I could accomplish this on the weekend, it was short term by definition, and I knew I could handle gift wrapping!

**What other roles have you had at CBE?**

Formal roles have been co-chair of Sisterhood, Controller, Chair of the Chesed committee, Co-chair of the recent Rabbi Search Committee, and Co-coordinator of the recent Rabbi installation.

**What have been the most memorable or rewarding experiences doing this volunteer role?**

As others have said before me, the most rewarding experience of volunteering at CBE has been meeting and becoming friendly with my fellow congregants. Without volunteering in some way, a member robs themselves of being truly incorporated into the fabric of our community. Volunteering transforms a member from being anonymous to one who feels like they really belong.

**What are you most proud of accomplishing as a CBE as a volunteer?**

I am most proud of doing my part to making sure that CBE continues to stand, not only as a physical building but as a place where any Jew or Jew adjacent person is welcomed and can have a 'seat at the table' where we all belong.

**What would you like congregants to know about volunteering at CBE?**

Volunteering can be as small or as big as one wishes. Some things can be done from home or in person. I would urge anyone to just 'jump in' as the water is fine. There are so many choices of ongoing programs and committees that surely there will be something that appeals.

**Anything else you'd like to mention?**

When I joined CBE 26 years ago, I had two small kids, worked full time, and had a husband who was raised in a different faith but was open to raising Jewish children in a Jewish home. I started volunteering in an extremely small way but as I met others at CBE, my (and our) world grew so much larger, and I said 'ok, sure' more times than I declined. CBE then became such an important place for our family, as I hope it will be for anyone reading this. The choice is yours so please say 'ok, sure' when asked – you won't regret it as your fellow congregants are really wonderful people!

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*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.*

#### QUESTION:

On Monday, January 15 we celebrate the national Holiday honoring the birthday of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the most influential Americans of the past century. Our Congregation has a wonderful tradition of hosting a breakfast celebration for the wider community. This year will be the 22nd annual Martin Luther King, Jr., breakfast at Beth Elohim and will feature a very special speaker who has had a great impact on education for Boston students.

A half century ago, Dr. King's leadership and oratory inspired the country and fueled the still unfinished civil rights movement. His words struck a deep chord with African-Americans, and also among Jews, many of whom eagerly joined his cause. Some even died for it, like Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner, murdered by the Klu Klux Klan during the hot Mississippi summer of 1964. Black-Jewish relations were never stronger than when Dr. King was the undisputed leader of the civil rights movement, before his 1968 assassination in Memphis. Besides inspired leaders and workers, however, community organizations also need money to make an impact. Were Jewish people as generous with dollars as they were with sympathy for the civil rights cause?

Ponder your response – and find the answers below.

## Chanukah at CBE's Early Learning Center

*Thanks to our CBE Early Learning Center Director Sam Valente-Phillips, we have a wonderful glimpse at the world of our young students downstairs as they learn about and celebrate Chanukah. The photo with Rabbi David is from the ELC's annual family Chanukah celebration, which Sam says is the largest they've ever had. Yasher Koach to all of the wonderful staff at the ELC!*





## Lifecycle and Milestone Events in Our Community

### B'nai Mitzvah



*On November 4, Noah Chenail celebrated becoming a B'nai Mitzvah on our CBE bimah. He proudly holds the Torah with his parents Gregg and Eva, and Rabbi David and then poses with his parents and sisters Nora and Eden.*



### B'nai Mitzvah

*Annie Barron became a B'nai Mitzvah on November 18. Here*

*we see her on the bimah with father Seth, and celebrating with her father, brothers Josh and Zach, step-mom Ilana, step-brother Micah and step-sister Sadie.*



#### **A Wedding at Fruitlands and CBE's Traveling Chuppah**

*On September 8, Daniel Biales married Jennifer Mis on the grounds of Fruitlands Museum in Harvard. The event was remarkable for so many reasons! First the groom was (obviously!) the son of CBE members Sarah Coletti and Michael Biales. The weather however, was threatening, with the tail winds of Hurricane Lee whipping across New England as Michael was setting up the chuppah. Fortunately, the weather cleared and the ceremony, officiated by Rabbi David, proceeded on schedule.*



*But there is more. The chuppah was CBE's "traveling chuppah", built by beloved CBE member Carl Bender (z"l) in 2004 for the Bender's daughter's wedding. As the story goes, it was then borrowed by so many others, and shipped to so many sites across the country, that it earned the moniker "traveling chuppah"*



and was written up in an [article](#) for The New York Times in 2014 by none other than Ellen and Allan Krueger's niece Alyson.

Sarah Coletti tells us that the chuppah is now stored at CBE for anyone who wishes to borrow it for a future nuptial.

From the top:

Michael Biales assembling the chuppah in the wind; the ceremony, officiated by Rabbi David; Jennifer and Daniel; the wedding couple flanked by Daniel's mom Sarah Coletti and dad Michael Biales.



Has your family celebrated a recent simcha or milestone? Send us up to 6 photos with a brief description; and we will make a selection to include in our next newsletter.

Email [communications@bethelohim.org](mailto:communications@bethelohim.org).

## Please Participate in Our 2-Minute Survey!

### The Star Survey — January 2024

*The Star* newsletter — in email format — was launched in June of 2022 by a handful of CBE volunteers. In it we have tried to shine the light on the wonderful people in our congregation, messages from our clergy and lay leaders, Jewish insights, plus a dose of holiday magic, music, food, and nachas — with a hope that it enriches our readers spiritual lives and feeds their connection to CBE.

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Today we'd like to know what you think we're doing right, what could be tweaked, and what we can just toss. It should take only about 2 minutes to complete unless you want to tell us more in the open-ended section at the end. Please know that your email address will not be recorded, so responses will be completely anonymous.

Click [here](#) to start!

## What's Happening at CBE This Month?

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

# Donations

We thank our members, their relatives and friends, and the larger community for donations received by check through December 14 and online through December 28. If you do not see your donation, please look for our next announcement on February 1, or contact [communications@bethelohim.org](mailto:communications@bethelohim.org).

## Adult Education Fund

Fred & Doris Goldstein / In memory of Ninette Riesman, mother of Elan Riesman. With deep sympathy, Dorrie and Freddy Goldstein

## Alex Young Social Action Fund

Betsy Keyack / In honor of Ethan Sokol

Don Hoban & Marcy Epstein Hoban / In memory of Andy Frank, brother of Barbara Frank Michaelson

Ethan Sokol & Kristine Fong

Gary & Judy Budiansky / In memory of Andrew Frank, brother of Barbara Frank Michaelson

Leslie & William Schroeder / In memory of Andrew J. Frank

Matthew Liebman & Amy Michelson / In memory of Andy Frank, brother of Barbara Frank Michaelson

Michael Biales & Sarah Coletti / In memory of Andrew J. Frank

Rev. Cindy Worthington-Berry / In memory of Andrew Frank, Barbara Frank's brother, and in support of Mt. Calvary Community Supper

Sue Abrams / In memory of Andy Frank, brother of Barbara Frank Michaelson

Toby Biller / In memory of Andy Frank

## Amy Naparstek Israel Scholarship Fund

Chips & David Naparstek / In loving memory of Chips's father, Ben Harris, on the occasion of his yahrzeit

Chips & David Naparstek / In loving memory of our daughter, Amy Naparstek, on the occasion of her yahrzeit

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Peter Stark, dear friend of Dan Klein

Ethan Sokol & Kristine Fong

Linda & Denis Friedman / Wishing Chips Naparstek an especially happy birthday - with love from her friends

Michael Luckens & Sharon Schumack

## Cantoral Fund

Michelle & Chris Siegert / In honor of Cantor Sarra

Gary & Judy Budiansky / In memory of Ninette Riesman

## Chesed Fund

Miriam Beit-Aharon

## Choir Fund

Gary & Judy Budiansky / For Giving Tuesday

## General Fund

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Harvey Lapin

Marsha Tucker / In memory of Rivelle Sutton, beloved mother of Michelle Siegert

Barbara Siegert / In memory of Rivelle Sutton

Bob & Kathie Becker / In memory of Rivelle Sutton

Cyndy & Bob Burke / In memory of Rivelle Sutton

Donald & Ellen Bloch / In memory of Rivelle Sutton

Michelle & Chris Siegert / In memory of Rivelle Sutton

**Gerson Stutman Memorial Beautification Fund**

Bruce & Carol Smith / In honor of Tucker White's naming in memory of his great grandfather  
Gerson Stutman

**High Holiday Appeal**

Matthew & Stacy Briggs  
Neil Epstein  
Steven & Sara Levine  
Steven & Tina Bloom

**Library Fund**

Miriam Beit-Aharon / For two books from one-dollar-a-book rack

**MLK Event Donation**

Linda & Denis Friedman  
Sheila Murphy

**Na'aseh Social Justice Fund**

Betsy Keyack / In honor of Ethan Sokol  
Sean Witty / In memory of Michael Ferrara

**Rabbi Lewis Mintz Fund**

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Ida Berkwitts, Dan Klein's grandmother

**Rabbi's Discretionary Fund**

Don Hoban & Marcy Epstein Hoban / In memory of Rivelle Sutton, mother of Michelle Siegert  
Michelle & Chris Siegert

**Scientists in the Synagogue Event**

Chips & David Naparstek  
Dan & Shelley Klein  
Ed & Nancy Kleiman  
Ellen Valade  
Frank & Linda Cohen  
Joseph & Rosalie Oliveri

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## The People of Chelm Want to Know...

**ANSWER TO QUESTION POSED ABOVE:**

Reverend Martin Luther King had a very special affection for Jewish people, and the feeling was mutual. In fact, during the heyday of the civil rights movement in the 50's and 60's, it is estimated that Jews contributed about half of the support funds – far out of proportion to their numbers in the general population or even the progressive community. It is worth noting that Dr. King also had a special connection with the Boston area. He received his doctorate at Boston University. His use of nonviolent civil disobedience to achieve social goals earned him a Nobel Prize as he further developed this great tradition that India's great Mahatma Gandhi brought to the world's attention in the 1920s. Gandhi in turn drew from the writings of Concord's Henry David Thoreau and his essay "Civil Disobedience", which argued for peaceful disobedience against an unjust state. .

## 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](#)  
[Oneinforty.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!

Do you like our articles? If there is an individual or effort you'd like to see featured, please let us know! Please also don't hesitate to let us know if you had any issues with downloading, reading, or if you had any issues accessing your email version of *The Star*. For all of the above, please write to [communications@bethelohim.org](mailto:communications@bethelohim.org).

Until next time,

*The Star* editorial and design team —

Gary Budiansky, Maida Fund, Rick Green, Beth Schrager, Lauren Solomon

Visit us at [www.bethelohim.org](http://www.bethelohim.org)



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