

The Star

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



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In this issue...

Shalom! As May has arrived with blossoms of every variety, we hope that this issue of The Star brings our readers as much joy as those daffodils, forsythia and cherry blossoms. As always there is so much going on at CBE that we can hardly catch our breath — although we leave the details of those many events to our sister publication Star-Lite. In this issue of The Star our co-presidents bid adieu to their two-year term, we share a heartfelt farewell with ELC Director Sam Valente-Phillips, we learn about some Jewish history in Boston, and we thank and acknowledge ALL of our religious school teachers. We hope you enjoy!

Message from Our Co-Presidents



Dear CBE Community and Friends,

It is a bittersweet time for us as we approach the end of our two-year term as Co-Presidents of CBE. We are planning for the Annual Meeting on Sunday and reflecting not only on all the wonderful happenings at CBE in the past year, but in the last two years as we served as CBE co-presidents. Some highlights for us have been:

- Working with incredible professional staff including Rabbi David, Cantor Sarra, Cindy Kalish, Miriam Beit Aharon, Sam Valente Phillips, and Beth Goldstein to bring the values of CBE to life and support the family that is CBE
- The community wide Walk Against Hate coordinated by Kulanu which brought out hundreds of community members to stand together against hate and bias in our community at a time right after October 7th when so many of us needed to feel this support.
- New programs such as Rosh Hashanah lunch and the Kosher Chinese dinner which brought together CBE members across generations to have fun and eat delicious food together
- Completion of the new Toddler Playground with funds from the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program
- An outstanding auction that raised over \$50,000 for improvements at CBE including gorgeous new carpet in our sanctuary
- Focusing on the JOY of being Jewish this year through song, prayer, and community building
- New member families from the ELC bringing energy and joy to Tot Shabbat, Temple Tots and other programs
- Shepherding constitution changes that brought the board to a more streamlined and strategic function and kicking off that work with an outstanding board retreat last fall

It has been our pleasure to work with so many different congregants and community members to ensure CBE is a welcoming, supportive place for all where any member can find their space to grow Jewishly and personally.

We thank the Board of Directors, Professional Staff and many many volunteers for making our lives JOYFUL over the past two years.

See you on Zoom at the annual meeting,
Lindsay and Laura

Parting Thoughts with ELC Director Sam Valente-Phillips

This spring we learned that the Director of our Early Learning Center, Sam Valente-Phillips, would be leaving the CBE ELC at the end of June. Sam first came to us as an ELC parent back when it was still run by the JCC — and she immediately fell in love with our preschool. From helping as a part-time teacher and floater, she moved up to assistant director and, in March 2022, to director.

When we met with Sam last week to hear her parting thoughts, we weren't sure what to expect. What we unearthed were boatloads of love and appreciation – and a departure that completely ties in with her legacy. What follows is only a taste and has been heavily edited for length and clarity:



What do you love about being the Director of the ELC?

I love being able to be in each of the classrooms on a daily basis. I know every kid in the school. I can jump in at any point at any class and either run it or support it or whatever it needs. I love being able to advocate for the kids and to help the teachers solve problems.

What are you most proud of?

The toddler playground. It's all natural wood and stone. It was collaboratively designed and is a model for how a toddler playground can be. I'm also proud of getting the teachers health insurance.

What will you miss?

We're in the relationship business. We build community and that's where my heart is. I'll miss that a lot. People here are amazing and the kids are amazing. You know, there are kids in the Hebrew school — or have even graduated — who I've taught at the ELC.





Tell me about work-life balance.

My teachers know that I believe to my core in work-life balance. If they don't have work-life balance then they can't do their job to the best of their ability. They can't be worried that "oh no, Sam's gonna be mad at me if I have to call out because my daughter's sick". That stress needs to be removed.

How is your leaving tied to this?

Since COVID, the director's job has been 24/7 and 365 days a year. Every night, over the weekend, and even when I'm away, I may need to respond to a text that a teacher is going to be out. Before COVID we had a list of 10 people we could call. But during COVID, for a number of reasons, that list vanished and I have to be able to scramble and rearrange at any time. I can be falling asleep at night thinking, "okay, so-and-so was not feeling good at school today; are they going to call out tomorrow?"

On top of this, my family has grown – my wife and I have 6 kids and 2 grandkids – and I'm

needed more at home. So, just like I've worked to remove stress from my teachers' lives to provide them with work-life balance – I now need to do that for myself. I might end up working part-time – or just a school year job. But I need to work a job that I can walk away from at 4 or 5 pm



Any thoughts about what you'll do when you leave?

I am thinking about writing a children's book. I've had one—I've had two or three in my head for about three, four years now. And I'm thrilled that they've found a replacement for me!! I hope she really continues the community. That's what we've built here, and that's what I want to see continue to grow.

Sam's last day will be June 30. You can reach her before then at ELCDirector@bethelohim.org.

The People of Chelm Want to Know...



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.

Illustration by Maurice Sendak.

We in Massachusetts are more conscious of history, than in many other areas of the USA, especially given the recent excitement for the 250th Anniversary of the commencement of the American Revolution next door in Concord. Today's question concerns the history of early New England synagogues.

QUESTION:

Congregation Beth Elohim (né Rodoff Shalom) may be the oldest synagogue in Acton, but there are many older in the Boston area.

The congregation of Temple Ohabei Shalom was founded in 1842 as the first Jewish congregation in this area. Ten years later they built the second New England synagogue, dedicating it on March 26, 1852; only Newport, Rhode Island's famous Touro Synagogue, dating from 1763, is older. In the mid-1800s when the first Boston synagogue was being established, the Jewish community of Boston was barely visible, numbering fewer than 100 families. (A few decades later came the substantial Eastern European migrations that spawned major Jewish centers throughout the Boston area).

In which neighborhood do you suppose this first Boston synagogue was built – the North End, Roxbury, Brookline, Dorchester, the South End, the West End, or Chelsea? All of these have been home to large Jewish communities. And for extra credit, did Ohabei Shalom, like the older Touro, subscribe to Sephardic traditions?

Ponder your response – and find the answers below.



*Rodoff Shalom, 1970
(Maynard Historical Society)*

End of School Year "Todah Rabbah" to Our CBE Religious School Teachers

We at The Star have long wished to acknowledge our CBE Religious School teachers, who are well known to religious school parents but less so to the rest of us. Turns out that many of them are CBE parents! But whether they are or not, they are enthusiastic, talented, and incredibly devoted to their students and to Jewish learning. We kick off our year-end appreciation with a word from our Religious School Director, Cindy Kalish.

Joyfully Jewish at CBE

"It may sound a bit cliché, but this truly has been a *Joyfully Jewish* year of learning at CBE. In my first year as Director of Education, I could not have asked for a better team of teachers. Our veteran teachers and our first year teachers have poured their souls into our students. Some days can be very challenging but everyday I feel truly grateful for this team of educators and their willingness to truly meet each individual student where they are at. *Todah Rabbah* – a HUGE thank you to this team of amazing Jewish humans!"

– *Cindy Kalish, CBE Director of Education*

Jodie Zwirn

What do your students call you?

The kids call me Jodie

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

I teach the Temple Tots class – monthly Jewish preschool class for kids ages 2–5 with an adult.

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

I just completed my 2nd year teaching Temple Tots. I previously taught Gan (kindergarten) in 2017 and 2018.

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I am also a CBE parent. My children both completed the religious school and became *b'nai mitzvot* at CBE. My daughter also attended ELC for preschool.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I joined the ELC staff 3 years ago. CBE is like a second home to me and I love working with young kids. I quickly became certified as a preschool teacher and have enjoyed being on the staff. I was asked if I would consider teaching a monthly holiday school for the preschool age. Perfect combination to contribute to the religious school while working with the age I enjoy the most.

Is there anything about your life outside of the CBE religious school that you'd like to share



with us?

My husband, Rob, and I along with our two children have been living in Westford for almost 14 years. Our son Jack is finishing his freshman year at University of Maryland studying journalism and our daughter Riley is finishing her freshman year at Westford Academy.

Naomi Katz MIntz

What do your students call you?

My kids call me "Morah Nomi"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

Currently teaching: Kindergarten (Gan class)

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

Been working at the CBE since many of the current parents were students in the school

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

Puppets, music, and art are a part of all of my classes.



Amy Itzkovitz

What do your students call you?

"Morah Amy"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

1st and 2nd grades

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

On and off for 7 years.

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I have one son, Gabe, and he is the reason I started teaching Hebrew School. We joined CBE when he was going into 3rd grade, and they didn't have a 3rd grade teacher for the coming year. Leann was desperate for a teacher at the end of August, so I decided to jump in. Gabe was in my first class, and it was a big class of about 25 kids! Since then, I have



been teaching 2nd grade, an age group I enjoy very much. Since being in high school, Gabe has continued to be involved in the religious school as a *madrich* and a teaching assistant.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I enjoy introducing Jewish concepts to the students and helping them to feel proud of being Jewish. We have fun doing arts and crafts projects and I especially like to teach them to read Hebrew. Usually my 2nd graders are reading words by the end of the school year. This is something I feel very proud of, and they do too!

Is there anything about your life outside of the CBE religious school that you'd like to share with us?

Outside of CBE, I am a social worker with a private therapy practice in Acton and online. I live in Concord. I really love being in this area, and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else!

Rachel Klevan

What do your students call you?

"Morah Rachel"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

Currently I am teaching 1st and 2nd grade at CBE, as well as working with the 8th and 9th graders alongside my mom, Morah Bryna!

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

I only started teaching at CBE in January, but I'm so happy to be part of this warm and welcoming community and excited to be teaching 3rd grade next year.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I love incorporating art and inspiring creativity in the classroom as a way to help students connect with and express their Jewish identity.

Is there anything about your life outside of the CBE religious school that you'd like to share with us?

Outside of CBE, I have a strong passion for the arts, and I love spending time with my dog, Sherlock—especially taking him on long walks on sunny days. Working with students of different ages has shown me how powerful and joyful Jewish learning can be when it's interactive and meaningful. It's such a gift to teach alongside my mom and to share this experience together—it makes the work feel even more special.



Leslie Knight

What do your students call you?

"Morah Leslie"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach

3rd grade on Tuesdays, 3rd and 4th grades together on Sundays

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

This is my 6th full year (plus a bit to cover a maternity leave in spring 2019)

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I am! I have kids in 6th and 11th grade. I like that Hebrew School is something we do together. We listen to Haggigah radio on Sunday mornings on our drive in. And my 11th grader is my *madrichah* this year, which is fun!



What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I used to be a high school teacher, so I bring the perspective and understanding of what our kids' days are like in classrooms outside of CBE. I will say that 3rd and 4th graders give me way more hugs than my high schoolers ever did! I think having a kid currently in the religious school is another perspective I bring to my teaching.

Alana Clements

What do your students call you?

My students call me "Morah Alana"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

I currently teach 6th grade.

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

I have been teaching at CBE for four years.

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I am also a CBE parent. I have a daughter in 12th grade and a son in 8th. They have both been in my class and my daughter has been my *Madricha*. The nice thing about being their teacher is seeing them in class and interacting with their friends. It is something that you don't normally get to see as a parent. They also love to give me feedback on my lessons. They provide a weekly performance review.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I had a very negative religious school experience as a child so I try my best to make it a positive experience for my students. I want them to like coming into school each week and enjoy their time in class.

Jess Rosenblatt

What do your students call you?

"Morah Jess"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

On Tuesdays I teach Hebrew and Electives with 4th, 5th, and 6th Graders. I also lead the K-3 *Z'man Kehillah* service every other Sunday.

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

Since this past October.

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I feel very lucky in that my children have been excited for me to become a Religious School teacher and want to be in my classes. I've appreciated having an inside look at their educational experience at CBE.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?



It's been really exciting to have my personal and professional interests line up with the subjects I'm teaching at CBE. I've been studying Modern Hebrew online through American Jewish University for almost five years, and it's been really meaningful to use that knowledge to help our students experience Hebrew as a living, spoken language. I love singing and leading prayers, and it's been rewarding to use those skills to help engage our younger students and their families in a singalong-style *Z'man Kehillah* service. And I've drawn on my professional experience as an experience designer and game designer to run electives that give our students a taste of building those types of projects. In the fall we created a pop-up immersive installation inspired by the theme of *Yira* (Awe), in the winter we built a LEGO town with examples of *V'Ahavta Lereiacha Kamocha* (Love Your Neighbor As Yourself), and currently we're working on board games that connect to the theme of *Tikkun Olam* (Repairing the World).

Jodi Bromberg

What do your students call you?

Students call me Jodi

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

5th grade on Sunday mornings

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

I began teaching this past fall.

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I'm not a CBE parent, but I am a parent! My 13-year-old sons became *b'nai mitzvot* earlier this year, and my 5 year old daughter loves making challah.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I have loved becoming part of the CBE community, and am appreciative of everyone's warm welcome and smiles. For 10 years, I ran a national Jewish nonprofit for called 18Doors, where I first met Rabbi David. I have not taught Hebrew school before, but bring my own joy of Judaism and creativity to the role.

Is there anything about your life outside of the CBE religious school that you'd like to share with us?

I live in Acton with my wife Courtney and three kids, and love living here! I have a small consulting practice for nonprofits, where I help with strategic planning, staff and board retreats, fundraising and governance. When I'm not at CBE, you can usually find me watching one of my kids' sporting events, baking something fun, or exploring the outdoors.



Ilana Epstein

What do your students call you?

Students call me "Morah Ilana" but sometimes just "Ilana"

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

Hebrew and electives (taught improv and now musical theater) on Tuesday evenings
How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

One year. It has been such a wonderful experience, and I'm sad to leave as I graduate Brandeis!

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I have a very different religious background than a lot of my students, so it's been exciting to teach them Jewish stories that they hadn't heard before-- like our upcoming show about Rabbi Akiva! I have a background in theater and am a creative person in general, so it has been incredibly fulfilling to explore and create with the kids. I love listening to the kids' stories and getting to know their unique personalities.

Is there anything about your life outside of the CBE religious school that you'd like to share with us?

I'd just like to add that the staff at CBE is so warm and supportive, which has made me look forward to coming to work every week.



Bryna Klevan

What do your students call you?

"Morah Bryna."

What grades/subjects do you currently teach?

I teach grades 4–6 on Tuesdays, grade 7 on Sunday mornings, and grades 8–9 on Sunday afternoons. The subjects range from Hebrew to *T'fillot* (Prayers), *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers), Social Justice, and *Tikkun Olam*. I've participated in the CJP Boston-Haifa connection with our sister school in Haifa since 2017 – and, in each class, regardless of the subject, I try to infuse a bit of a connection to our friends in Haifa.

How long have you been teaching at the CBE Religious school?

I began teaching in 2015—totally by chance. Leann Shamash, the Educational Director at the time, reached out to my husband Gerry to see if he was available to teach on Sundays. Gerry had already taken another teaching job and wasn't available. I offered to sub until Leann found someone else – and discovered my passion for teaching!

My first year was in the fourth grade and the year-long curriculum was "Passover, All the Time." The textbook was the Haggadah and we immersed ourselves in the story of the Exodus, studying about how the Israelites left Egypt. We had a visit from a friend who told us



about his journey from Ethiopia to Israel – from tyranny to freedom – and he described in detail how he walked across the Sudan with his family when he was only 8 years old. We learned about modern day slavery with the cocoa-bean industry and its use of child labor and why we should consider purchasing free-trade chocolate.

Although the school curriculum has since changed, I continue to appreciate the creative ways we deliver content to our students, whether it be through nature, game-making, cooking, songs, art or theater. I love working with Cindy and all of the teachers at CBE.

Some of our teachers are also CBE parents. If you are one of them, what is that like?

I am not the parent of any of our students, but I am the proud parent of a fellow teacher!! My daughter Rachel just started teaching at CBE this year and teaches 2nd and 8th/9th grades.

What do you feel that you personally bring to this special job that makes you unique?

I am passionate about my Judaism and about Israel. I love sharing our Jewish values and traditions with the students – to give them an anchor in their Judaism that can carry into their adult life. When I started teaching during the week, I remembered how exhausting it was as a child to go from regular school to Hebrew School in the afternoons. So in 2019 I enrolled in an amazing program for teachers called "Breathe for Change" and became certified in Yoga & Mediation and received a certificate as a Social Emotional Learning Facilitator. Little did I know then, but with COVID I realized how important these tools were in remote learning and then when we returned to in-person again.

Is there anything about your life outside of the CBE religious school that you'd like to share with us?

My husband Gerry Frim and I are both attorneys and both teach religious school as well. My youngest child made aliyah after graduating from Gann Academy, recently completed his mandatory military service and now lives near Tel Aviv. So if I'm headed out of town, there's a good chance you'll find me on an El Al flight heading to Israel. My older three children all live in MA. My husband and I live in Newton and love spending Shabbat together with family and friends.



Our religious school is so fortunate to participate in the CJP Boston-Haifa Connection. Our sixth and seventh grade classes have participated in several Zoom calls with our sister school in Haifa. On a trip to Haifa, Morah Bryna attended two classes, brought notes from Haifa students back to our students, and facilitated return messages. She is pictured here with a Haifa class and their teacher Ella.

Kvell Korner — Looking for Your News!!!

We are renaming our "lifecycle events" section -- to recapture the breadth and spirit of its predecessor in *Star-Lite*. We want to kvell over events large and small. Send us your news and photos to communications@bethelohim.org and we will include them in our next issue!



On March 28, 2025, Cindy Kalish's daughter Hannah was married at the Hawthorne Hotel in Salem, MA. It was an exquisite wedding filled with so much JOY! Pictured here are Cindy and her wife, Martha, walking Hannah down the aisle.

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

Stephen Richter / In honor of Cantor Sarra, with thanks for the Four Winters film

Amy Naparstek Israel Scholarship Fund

Andrea Harris / In honor of her sister, Chips

David & Chips Naparstek / In honor of Chips's sister, Andy, on her birthday

Cantorial Fund

Vanessa & Oleg Volinsky / In memory of Dr. James C. and Diana K. Fraser

Chesed Fund

Lauren Solomon / In honor of Emily Blumberg's dedication and service to our community and in thanks to the organizers of the Caregiver event

Choir Fund

Chuck & Lauren Pollak

Joseph & Rosalie Oliveri / In appreciation of Shabbat Shira

General Fund

Alan & Arlene Weiss / In memory of Marsha Stewart, sister of Peter Lovitz

Lauren Solomon / In loving memory of my grandmother, Hannah Rosen, my mother, Joan Lapin, and my aunt, Roberta Scheller, on the occasion of their yahrzeits

Ronni Kenger / In memory of Terrie Winograd Block

Jason Goldfarb Youth Fund

CBE Brotherhood / In recognition of Steve Michelson's presentation at the Brotherhood Breakfast on 4/6/25

Joan Snyder Library Fund

Steven Snyder / I hope our Dad's gift will enrich the lives of new generations of Jewish people with joy in learning and the life of the mind that was so precious to both our mother and father

Na'aseh Social Justice Fund

Bob & Christine Brown / In thanks for allowing Indivisible to use the parking lot for buses to the Hands Off protest

Debra & Neal Elliott

Rabbi Lewis Mintz Fund

CBE Brotherhood / In recognition of Steve Michelson's presentation at the Brotherhood Breakfast on 4/6/25

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

Allan & Ellen Krueger / In honor of our parents, Murray Krueger and Sydney Feinstein

Debra & Neal Elliott

Joseph & Rosalie Oliveri / Sale of Chametz
Kathie & Bob Becker / Sale of Chametz
Lauren Solomon / Sale of Chametz
Leslie & Bill Schroeder / Sale of Chametz
Linda & Denis Friedman / Sale of Chametz
Ronni Kenger / Sale of Chametz

The People of Chelm Want to Know...

ANSWER TO QUESTION POSED ABOVE:

Today the congregation of Temple Ohabei Shalom occupies a magnificent Byzantine building on Beacon Street in Brookline. This is Boston's oldest congregation, founded in 1842, in what is today the Theatre District of the South End. They built Boston's first synagogue in 1852 on Warrenton Street (then called just Warren Street), which runs off Stuart Street between Charles and Tremont. The next home for Ohabei Shalom, from 1863–1886, situated diagonally opposite from the first synagogue, was the building that now houses the Charles Playhouse on Warrenton Street. In 1887 the congregation moved to still larger quarters further into the South End. And in 1928 they moved to their current site in Brookline. The Touro Synagogue was found by descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, who had arrived in Newport as early as 1658. Boston's was established by recently arrived German and Polish Ashkenazi Jews.



*Temple Ohabei Shalom, 1928
(Brookline Historical Society) and
more recently, below.*



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.

L'hitraot (until next time),
The Star editorial and design team

Visit us at www.bethelohim.org



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