

Welcome to Our B'nai Mitzvah

November 13, 2021 Temple Beth El 9 Kíslev 5782 Stamford, Connecticut

Melody Bryant Shira bat Zelig v' Malcha

Saffron Castle Zipporah bat Avraham v'Sarah

Fran Ginsburg Fradel bat Yehudah Menachem v'Rut

Paula Green Pesha Bosha bat Natan v'Sarah

Juli Harris Yocheved Aviva bat Shlomo ha-Leví v' Dina Rífka

Leslie Heyison Yehudit Ettel bat David v'Sarah

Barbara Rothstein Basha Gittel bat Eliyah

Brían Steranka Avraham Maanís ben Avraham v'Sarah

Hope Stanger Chana bat Avraham Maanis v'Chaya Yenta

DEDICATIONS

On this special Shabbat, we recall the memories of relatives who paved the way for us and live in our hearts today and always. We dedicate this booklet to them.

Melody Bryant

Sidney Prenner (father)

Bob Sober (brother-in-law)

Harvey Goldberg (cousin)

Martha Prenner (mother)

Jodi Caroline Sober (niece)

Emmy (family friend)

Saffron Castle

Holding my grandparents in my heart - Owen, Joan, Adrian and Margaret.

Fran Ginsburg

Walter Wertheim (father)

Max Yunker (grandfather)

Paula Green

Sondra Berkowitz (mother)

Nathan Berkowitz (father)

Pesiah Berkowicz (grandmother)

Morritz Berkowicz (grandfather)

Sarah Green (mother-in-law)

Julius Green (father-in-law)

Rose Babkes (grandmother)

Louis Schwartzman

(grandfather)

Juli Harris

On this day I'm reminded of all the strong and daring women in my family who preceded me. They took risky journeys, started new lives in foreign lands, and provided me with a legacy of resilience and fortitude. Because of their determination I am grateful to be here. But in my heart, it is the life of my late son, William Matthew Harris z'l, that inspires me daily to be a better person, contribute to my community, and to more fully incorporate Jewish traditions and values into my life.

DEDICATIONS (continued)

On this special Shabbat, we recall the memories of relatives who paved the way for us and live in our hearts today and always. We dedicate this booklet to them.

Leslie Heyison

Donald Halprin (father)
Nathan Halprin (grandfather)
Clara Chatzek Halprin (grandmother)
Marvin Charney (uncle)

Jack Heyison (father-in-law) Florence Recht Heyison (mother-in-law) Blanche Verovsky (aunt)
Ronnie Verovsky (cousin)
Abraham Yankeloff (uncle)
Benjamin Yankeloff
(grandfather)

Rebecca Meyers Yankeloff (grandmother)

Barbara Rothstein

To my grandfather, Max Schneider, who took me to synagogue every Friday night as a child and my parents, Evelyn and Edwin Lieberfarb, who instilled an appreciation for my Jewish heritage and culture.

Hope Stanger

When we first started our B'nai Mitzvah journey and thought it would be taking place a year and a half ago, I assumed my beautiful mother would be there, and I shared the date with her. Little did I know she would leave this earth between then and now. I dedicate this day and my Bat Mitzvah to my amazing parents; Abraham and Claire Stanger, who gave me an outstanding Jewish education and a loving and joyful Jewish home. And to all the Jews; women and men, who took a stand for being Jewish despite the persecutions thrust upon them. You are why we are here at this moment.



OUR JOURNEY

About three years ago, twenty adult students gathered, eager to learn more about Jewish history and Judaism and to prepare for a rite of passage that had eluded us for a variety of reasons that will be described in the Personal Journeys that follow.

As the preparations were proceeding - with two months to go - fate interceded in the form of a coronavirus. We reluctantly canceled our plans for May 2020, regrouped and forged ahead. Jews throughout history have confronted obstacles before and we weren't going to be deterred by a mere global pandemic.

We continued our studies via Zoom with a new B'nai Mitzvah date of June 19th and then moved again to today, November 13, 2021. While our ranks did thin along the way, we acknowledge and appreciate the many ways everyone contributed to our lively discussions.

After many hours of study, nine of us are prepared to stand before you and chant the blessings, Torah and Haftarah portions we have so proudly learned. We want to thank Rabbi Hammerman for teaching us Jewish history, the rituals and Torah, for fielding innumerable questions and for his general good humor and encouragement. He showed us why communal learning is so much a part of Jewish tradition. Thank you, Cantors Bear and Kaplan. From Cantor Bear, we learned "color-coordinated assisted" trope. We also benefited from our one-on-one sessions. Cantor Kaplan brought a spiritual component to our classes, and we are grateful for all her help. Thank you to the TBE staff who helped us achieve our special day. Finally, thank you to our family members and friends for supporting us in this journey.

From all of us:

"Who is wise? He who learns from every person." Pirkei Avot 4:1

2021 B'NAI MITZVAH CLASS

Our B'nai Mitzvah Timeline

October 2018	Orientation meeting with Rabbi Hammerman and Cantor Fishman Email sent out about starting an adult B'nai Mitzvah class	
November 2018	20 people have signed up. Tentative date: May 2, 2020	
Trovelliber 2010	Our first class—Intro to Judaism + Prayer and Synagogue Skills	
	Who/ what is a Jew? Trope is "Hiddur", beautifies reading of the Torah.	
December 2018	Rabbi Hammerman taught us about disruptions and inflection points in	
December 2010	Jewish history. Judaism is an evolution of civilizations. Tropes are a	
	language system unto themselves help!	
January 2019	New year, new schedule – now meeting twice a month. Reviewed	
2019	Chumash, Tanakh, Masoretic texts. Triennials, the Prophets, and so on.	
February 2019	Trope recordings via email (the first of many!). Learned that Judaism	
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	attunes us to the rhythms of time and nature.	
April-May 2019	Searching for a date; emails, Doodle polls, etc.	
1 7	Sue Shapiro will offer an adult Hebrew class to help us.	
June 2019	Hooray! We have a date: May 16, 2020 Parashat - Behar/ Behukotai	
	Last class before the summer break Learned about Kashrut.	
October 2019	First class of the fall. Cantor Bear to teach Synagogue Skills and Trope.	
	B'nai Mitzvah "To Do" List (aside from class content).	
November 2019	Trope practice, practice	
December 2019	Discussed Behar-Bechukotai – time to work on our Divrei Torah!	
January 2020	Reviewed order and protocols of the service.	
	Started Luncheon planning!	
February 2020	Granular review of how to pronounce words, Blessings before and after	
	Torah and Haftarah.	
March 9, 2020	Our last in-person class, just before Purim.	
Mid-March 2020	The world started shutting down due to Covid-19.	
March 25, 2020	Told that May 16 th , 2020 date will not be feasible.	
April 2020	New date: June 19, 2021 - Parashat Hukkat.	
December 2020	"New", new date: November 13, 2021 - Parashat Vayetzei.	
March 2021	Getting started again, now on Zoom with 9 classmates.	
April 2021	We received our new Torah and Haftarah assignments, new color-coded	
	sheets and audio recordings to study. We are pros and know what to do!	
September 2021	Starting up again with force! Engaged in learning our portions with Cantor	
	Bear and writing Divrei Torah.	
October 2021	Rabbi Hammerman and Cantor Kaplan helped us plan the service.	
	Creating booklet describing our journey becoming B'nai Mitzvah,	
	dedications, readings and Divrei Torah. Almost there!	
November 10, 2021	Dress rehearsal.	
November 13, 2021	We made it!	

TODAH RABAH

As we are called to the Torah becoming B'nai Mitzvah, we would like to thank:

- Rabbi Hammerman, Cantor Kaplan and Cantor Bear for their instruction, encouragement, enthusiasm, and confidence in us,
- ➤ Steve Lander and Mindy Rogoff for providing guidance and oversight in service planning,
 - A special shout-out to Mindy Rogoff for her help with the booklet,
 communications as well as her good judgment on what works
- Melody Bryant, Fran Ginsburg, Paula Green, Leslie Heyison, and Barbara Rothstein for their help with preparations spanning writing/communications, arranging for the Bimah food baskets, gift cards, Grab and Go bags, and preparing this booklet,
- > Previous Adult B'nai Mitzvah classes for inspiring us to follow in their paths,
- > Our families for their loving support,
- > Our friends and fellow congregants for sharing in our simcha today,
- ➤ Our brothers and sisters in Israel who are defending our Jewish homeland and future.



PARASHAT VAYEITZEI ORDER OF THE SERVICE

Shacharit (starting on page 147) Cantor Kaplan

Opening Torah Service (page 168)

Leslie Heyison

Aliyot/Torah Readers (page 172):

1. Vss. 31:17-21	Hope Stanger
2. Vss. 31:22-24	Rabbi Hammerman
3. Vss. 31:25-28	Saffron Castle
4. Vss. 31:29-32	Leslie Heyison
5. Vss. 31:33-35	Paula Green
6. Vss. 31:36-39	Melody Bryant
7. Vss. 31:40-42	Barbara Rothstein
8. Vss. 31:43-45	Juli Harris
9. Vss. 31:46-50	Brian Steranka

Fran Ginsburg

Chatzi Kaddish Cantor Kaplan Maftir 32:1-3 Cantor Kaplan

Blessing before the Haftarah (page 175)

B'nai Mitzvah Class

Haftarah

10. Vss. 31:51-54

1. Vss. 12:13-15	Cantor Kaplan
2. Vss. 13:1-2	Barbara Rothstein
3. Vss. 13:3-5	Saffron Castle
4. Vss. 13: 6-9	Fran Ginsburg
5. Vss. 13:10-12	Cantor Kaplan
6. Vss. 13:13-15	Hope Stanger
7. Vss. 14:1-3	Melody Bryant
8. Vss. 14:4-6	Leslie Heyison
9. Vss. 14:7-8	Juli Harris
10.Vss. 14:9-10	Paula Green

Blessings After Haftarah (page 175)

B'nai Mitzvah class

Mi Sheberach Cantor Kaplan

The Journey (page 9) Juli Harris

We are Grateful (page 10) Hope Stanger/

Brian Steranka

Ashrei (page 181) Hope Stanger

Returning the Torah to the Ark (page 183) Fran Ginsburg

Etz Hayim Hi (page 184) Fran Ginsburg

Divrei Torah Barbara Rothstein

Melody Bryant

Rabbi's remarks Rabbi Hammerman

A Kavanah and Blessing (page 8) B'nai Mitzvah class

Blessing B'nai Mitzvah class Led by Cantor Kaplan

Cantor's Blessing/Shehecheyanu Cantor Kaplan

Musaf (page 184) Cantor Kaplan

Aleinu (page 205) Melody Bryant/

Cantor Kaplan

Mourner's Kaddish (page 207) Rabbi Hammerman

Announcements TBE Board member

Adon Olam (page 211) Paula Green

Kiddush/Motzi B'nai Mitzvah Class

The Journey By Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice though the whole house began to tremble and you felt the old tug at your ankles. "Mend my life!" each voice cried. But you didn't stop. You knew what you had to do, though the wind pried with its stiff fingers at the very foundations, though their melancholy was terrible. It was already late enough, and a wild night, and the road full of fallen branches and stones. But little by little, as you left their voices behind, the stars began to burn through the sheets of clouds, and there was a new voice which you slowly recognized as your own, that kept you company as you strode deeper and deeper into the world, determined to do the only thing you could do determined to save the only life you could save

We are Grateful

Each morning
For the fresh promise of a new day
A day of new experience
Of warmth and friendship
Of new tasks undertaken, new fruits planted
Of efforts brought to fruition
Of bountiful harvests reaped.

We are Grateful

Each day
For the creative and nurturing capacities
we have been granted.
For the compassion to sense those in fear,
in hunger and in pain.
For the opportunity to share some of our bounty
with those less fortunate.

We are Grateful

Each evening

For the rest that comes after
the day's tasks are done.

For the satisfaction of enjoying
the fruits of our labors.

And for the opportunity to share
this completeness with our neighbors.

Author Unknown

A Kavanah and Blessing Upon Becoming B'nai Mitzvah

Adapted from Lori Hope Lefkovitz

Ready to accept Your invitation,
I stand before You, with humility and with joy,
prepared to enter more fully into the
weave of Your commandments.

Attentive to the call of my heart to do good, drawn by the pull of ancestors to sanctify life, and held by the bonds of community,

Alive to the mystery and possibility of redemption, I ask for strength and resolve that I may do Your will.

Through the discipline of *mitzvot*, I shore myself up against despair and express my faith in the potential of our partnership to repair our world.

You who gave us the gift of *Torah*, I am mindful of the many blessings of my life,

and I thank You for sustaining my body and guiding the maturation of my soul

that I may maintain a wide perspective, hear Your voice, appreciate what is sacred, and make righteous choices along the path of my return.

Blessed are You, our God, Spirit of the Universe, who made us holy through Your commandments and commanded us to sustain them.

ּבְרוּכָה אַתְּ יָהּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קְדַּשְׁתָנוּ בְּמִצוֹתֶיהָ וְצִוַּתְנוּ לְקַיֵּם מִצְווֹת

Brukhah At Yah Eloheynu Ruakh Ha'olam, asher kidshatnu b'mitzvoteha, v'tzivatnu l'kayem mitzvot.

Morning blessings

The breath of my life
Will bless,
The cells of my being
Sing,
In gratitude,
Reawakening

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May our ears be lifted, Our spirits refreshed, Our understanding deepened By the study of Torah.



May the blessings of peace and kindness, graciousness, goodness and compassion
Flow among us
And all the communities of Israel,
All the people of the world.

Marcia Falk

Prayer for Wholeness

Oh, World of Miracles, you are supremely broken.

Your shards are painful and cutting.

Your pieces are scattered across the globe, aching for wholeness.

We seek justice and peace in you.

We long and love, divine sparks igniting fires within us.

We tend the embers and feed the flames, at times nearly consuming ourselves and our neighbors.

We pray for--no, we demand--open heartedness and resilience.

We seek grace and peace. We pursue justice.

May the fragments of our world and the brokenness of our souls be blessed with strength, wisdom, and compassion.

May we be whole again, quickly, in our days.

- Alex Weissman

B'naí Mítzvah Blessing

May you be granted health of body and soul And may your noblest dreams and hopes be fulfilled.

May you be given joys to share with us. For when we share our hopes, they are strengthened And when we share our joys, they are enhanced.

May you always have the ability to find forgiveness in others, And never hold a grudge against those you forgive.

May you always try to improve yourself, And never in a way that would hurt others.

May you continue to be compassionate and caring And strong enough to be true to what you know is good and right.

May you measure your success by your degree of health, love and happiness,

And never by the things you possess.

Always remember how special you are, Continue to question and to seek out truth and goodness, And may it always bring you happiness and love.

- Author Unknown

RABBI JOSHUA HAMMERMAN

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November 13, 2021

To Our Adult B'nai Mitzvah Class of 2021...and 2020...and 2019...

Mazal tov on your achievement. Melody, Saffron, Fran, Paula, Juli, Leslie, Barbara, Hope and Brian, you are each fulfilling what has been a life-long dream, while simultaneously ending what has been a three-year nightmare. I know this is not what you may have envisioned this day to be when we got started. We assumed at least 500 people would be there in person (Zoom? What's Zoom?) and that we would see the faces of our friends, grandchildren, and everyone else imaginable right there in front of us. We thought at one point, when the date was shifted for the first time, that this would be the moment for our congregation to at last come out of quarantine and celebrate our 100th anniversary together.

We thought a lot of things. We were wrong. But we are wrong to underestimate what is happening here this Shabbat.

While this is different, it is no less meaningful and no less a celebration. In some ways it is more meaningful than it would have been, had it been "easy" and predictable.

In baseball you would be called our "starting nine." But in truth you are our *finishing* nine - the ones who made it through this grueling trial by Covid. And I am positively in awe of what you have accomplished simply by staying with it. They say that 80 percent of life is just showing up. That isn't to minimize the other 20 percent, which involved very hard work and, in some cases, significant compromises. In fact, you've learned parts of several portions, and have come up with brilliant insights on all of them. You've come together as no group I've ever seen, much less one that couldn't even sit in the same room for a year and a half. It's really one of the most remarkable accomplishments I've ever seen. You are our greatest Covid-era success story.

And that's why this B'nai Mitzvah will be different from all others. Everyone at TBE is exceedingly proud of what you've done – but even more, of who you are.

To the congregation: We are all busy people. But these amazing individuals deserve our undivided attention this Shabbat, wherever you may be. In years to come, we will be spinning tales of this class as we sit by the fire.

Mazal tov to all!

Rabbi Joshua Hammerman

CANTOR KATIE KAPLAN

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November 13, 2021

Dear Members of the 5782 Adult B'nai Mitzvah Class,

Mazal Tov! What a journey you've all been on both collectively and as individuals. Choosing to study and officially become B'nai Mitzvah is not a small decision, and your three-year winding road has been full of twists, turns, bumps, and detours. The fact that you have persevered, grown, asked questions, wrestled with three parshiot, studied with three cantors, learned in person, learned on ZOOM, learned on your own, learned in a group, and finally reached this day is a grand occasion for celebration.

I am truly honored to have been a part of your journey and am blessed to have had the opportunity to both teach and learn with you. My wish for you today, tied to your parsha, is that you remember Jacob's dream of the angels ascending and descending a heavenly ladder of light and that you know deep within, that you are always accompanied by radiant, divine, guiding energy in your lives. May you feel this light when approaching the Torah for your aliyah, when looking into the eyes of loved ones, when walking in sacred presence, and when bearing witness to others along this winding journey of life.

We often look outside of ourselves for validation and praise, but I hope that you will all look within today to celebrate your unique trajectory and growth on your Jewish journey. By becoming B'nai Mitzvah today, you step back in time to the moment of revelation at the foot of Mount Sinai, when our ancestors entered into a covenant with God as a Jewish people. Midrash teaches that all Jewish souls to ever exist were present for the Sinai moment, Jews by birth as well as Jews by choice, all gathered together to enter this covenant with the divine. Again today, the heavens open up and each one of you returns to that moment, connecting the cycle of time and completing an open link in the chain. It has been a long journey through rugged wilderness, but you've finally made it. Welcome home.

B'Shalom,

Cantor Katie Kaplan

Cantor Hatie Kaplan

My Precious Temple Beth El Students:

The Talmud offers us this wise perspective of a lifelong learner—"Much have I learned from my teachers, even more from my colleagues, but most of all from my students." Each of you has instructed me both in the deeper nuances of the Biblical languages of Hebrew and trop and in the finer points of making our studies together more accessible and meaningful. This gift that you carry into your futures truly warms my spirit. You are all a credit to yourselves, your families, your TBE community, and the Jewish people. May this day remind you always of your obligations as Jewish adults and your hard-earned capacity to fulfill them. I'm very proud of you and am happy to offer you my continuing support as newly minted B'nai Mitzvah!

Mazal Tov!

Cantor Moshe Bear Adjunct Tutor





Dear B'nai Mitzvah Class of 5782,

First of all, on behalf of the TBE Board of Trustees, a hearty Mazal Tov on this tremendous accomplishment. I know how hard you've all worked—over many years—to reach this important day and milestone.

Jews often think of B'nai Mitzvot as a teenage rite of passage, and for many it is. It is certainly a joy to watch our teens chant and learn and study as they become adults in the Jewish community. It is a different kind of joy to watch you take on this monumental task, as adults, in the midst of having jobs, families, and many responsibilities. For you to take this on now— way beyond your teenage years—speaks to your determination and your passion for Judaism. It is simply inspiring.

Thank you for showing us here at Temple Beth El that it is never too late to fulfill a dream. Thank you to Rabbi Hammerman, Cantor Kaplan, and Cantor Bear for providing the support for this wonderful program.

Yasher Koach on this impressive achievement.

B'Shalom, Lisa Manheim President, Temple Beth El

Personal Journeys & Dívreí Torah

Melody Prenner Bryant - On Becoming a Bat Mitzvah

Melody Prenner Bryant



One of my earliest memories occurred when I was only three. I carefully carried a tallis down a long aisle to the front of a crowded congregation to my older brother for him to wear the morning of his Bar Mitzvah service. It's a vivid and happy reminiscence. Many years later it didn't occur to me to challenge my parents when I turned twelve and attended a confirmation ceremony instead of a Bat Mitzvah. Girls were not permitted to read from the Torah in our conservative shul. No questions asked.

More recently, I celebrated when my children, Brad, Maddy, Cassy and Jarrett, in turn, were called to the Torah. We held festive parties, invited friends and family and, of course, danced the hora. On occasion I would ponder my own Bat Mitzvah, but it was always an inconvenient time or simply not readily available. Until my husband and I "joined" Beth El under the marvelous leadership of Rabbi Hammerman and I read a mention of an adult B'nai Mitzvah group in the weekly mailing. The timing was auspicious - my twins were to be B'nai Mitzvah-ed May of 2022. I could experience for myself the preparation and the honor of reading Torah.

More than two years later it has been a wonderful journey with not a few unexpected roadblocks. Time consuming? Yes. Inspirational? Most definitely. Regrets? Just one. Many years ago, I warned Brad I would tattoo his Torah portion when he resisted practicing — it's a particularly disturbing memory because he recited it effortlessly when the time came. To Brad — my abject apologies! Co-incidentally it is the very same parashah as my own. At least I wrote my own D'var Torah! And I received one of the best gifts ever when Brad, Maddy, Cassy and Jarrett presented me with a beautiful Tallis of my own. It was only fitting they said.



I would thank the Rabbi and Cantors Kate and Bear for their kind and unjudging assistance and the other members of the B'nai Mitzvah team for the lively discussions and for asking many probing questions I hadn't even thought of. I would like to acknowledge my husband for his unwavering support especially for many late dinners on Tuesday nights. Thank you to Brad, Maddy, Cassy, and Jarrett for their entertaining recollections of their own studying. Grahm and Reid will no doubt benefit from my new-found appreciation of the amount of work required - no more tattoo warnings! And thank you to my sister Phyllis who became a Bat Mitzvah at age 37 and who reminded me that it's never too late.

Melody Prenner Bryant

Fran Ginsburg - My Journey to Becoming a Bat Mitzvah

My story is similar in many ways to that of many women my age—and in some ways it is different. I grew up in a very small town in West Virginia where my father worked in my maternal grandfather's business. The Jewish community of 40 families was small but cohesive. My grandparents kept kosher and my grandfather was instrumental in helping build the synagogue there. My parents—and grandparents—had moved from New York City, so the setting wasn't ideal, but my father assumed that someday he would take over the business, and we were pretty much settled in until tragedy struck. My mother died when I was not quite 9 years old—and I had two younger siblings. My grandfather told my father that we needed to relocate so my father could find a nice Jewish woman to raise his children. Also, the business wasn't doing well, so there was no real future in that town. My father got a job in Cleveland, almost immediately did find the perfect wife, and we moved. I was stunned that I lived in a Jewish neighborhood. I had never seen so many Jews in my life. We joined a Conservative congregation, where I was very far behind in my knowledge and ended up in a class three grades behind where I was supposed to be. Eventually I caught up, but I was totally not interested in becoming a Bat Mitzvah. The girls could only do a Friday night ritual and did not read from the Torah. Very few of them bothered to go ahead. Also, I was –and still am—terrified of singing solo in public.

Over the years, after I met Gerry, we became increasingly involved in the Jewish community, at first in New York and then in Stamford. A few more things got in the way—medical school, residency, children, and a job where I was working 70 hours per week. Finally, encouraged by several friends, I decided to go for it. I figured, how hard could it be? I knew most of the prayers already. As I told my daughter, I can't believe every 13-year-old chants a complete Haftorah, and I struggled to learn just a few lines.

But, here we are. I want to thank Rabbi Hammerman, Cantor Kaplan, and Cantor Bear for their help. I also want to thank my children for leading by example, and, of course, my husband, Rabbi Gerry, who is the shining example that you can never be too old to study if you really want to.

Paula Green - My Bat Mítzvah Journey

Judaism has always been a major part of who I am. I absorbed it early on, from my parents and extended family, both the tragedy and the celebrations. My father escaped from Germany in 1939, at ten years old, along with his teenage sister, my Aunt Esther. My grandparents were unable to get out, and died, my grandfather in Sachsenhausen and my grandmother on a transport to Auschwitz. My mother's parents came from Romania and Poland with their families, shortly before World War I.

Through shared stories, holidays and traditions I continued to learn about and love being Jewish. When we moved from Brooklyn to Howard Beach, Queens, we joined Rockwood Park Jewish Center, which I've always thought of as an "American orthodox" synagogue. My parents were very involved in the shul, chairing committees, building campaigns and events. For several years, my father was its president and my mother was sisterhood president.

My father was known for his impassioned Kol Nidre appeal speeches. He spoke about coming to the US, the importance of the shul to our Jewish community, and how we needed to support it. Back then, people called out their pledges before the whole congregation, there was no private folding of tabs on a card. My mother was known for her sharp wit, cute "poems" and her organizing ability.

Israel had always been important to our family. We have a number of relatives there, including family who live on a kibbutz near Afula. In 1968, we took our first family trip to Israel. I had such strong feelings of excitement and joy as the plane approached Lod airport. I envisioned the Hebrew letters Yisrael carved into the side of the hill nearby. It was a magical two weeks, filled with sightseeing and family. We met relatives I'd never heard about, as well as reuniting with some who had visited or lived in the states. We also spent a week in Berlin, visiting my father's cousin, who had been hidden during the war, and her parents.

Over the years, my Jewish identity developed, through Hebrew school, Jewish camps by the East New York YMYWHA, youth groups and B'nai B'rith Girls. I stuffed envelopes for the shul, danced in the street at our rally to support Israel during the Six Day War and attended many simchas.

I met my husband, Ben Green, while we were at Brandeis University. After the Yom Kippur War, we wanted to go to Israel as volunteers, but due to parental opinion (primarily my parents), we didn't go. Several years after we were married, we did spend a year in Israel through the WUJS program. First, we were in Arad for six months, taking ulpan and other classes, then we lived and worked in Tel Aviv. It was a fascinating experience. A year after we returned, we moved to Stamford, CT. In 1985, our son Josh, was born, and in 1989, our daughter Alli. They are still the light of our lives, along with our three amazing grandsons. For several years, we were able to speak Hebrew when we didn't want the kids to understand our conversations, just as our parents had used Yiddish. However, after a few years at Bi-Cultural, we grew more circumspect, fearing their Hebrew had caught up to ours and we were out of luck.

This isn't my "first rodeo", so to speak. Shortly before my 12th birthday, I became a Bat Mitzvah at Rockwood Park. Of course, girls couldn't read Torah in an orthodox shul (or in a Conservative synagogue back then), but I did have the distinction of being the first to celebrate becoming a Bat Mitzvah on a Saturday night. I led some prayers and gave a speech about the commandment to honor one's parents. It was a joyous occasion, and I have wonderful memories.

I admired Josh and Alli's hard work preparing for their B'nai Mitzvah. The house was filled with the voices of Hazzan Rabinowitz and Cantor Jacobson, along with the stress of learning all this new material. They both did beautifully on their special days, and we were so proud.

I had considered participating in one of the adult B'nai Mitzvah classes, but it fell through the cracks between family, career and volunteer commitments. But as time went on, I thought more and more about it. I wanted very much to learn trope, and to read from the Torah. I wanted to have a "real" Bat Mitzvah. When I received Rabbi Hammerman's email in October 2018, I decided that it was time to throw my hat in the ring.

It has been a long and winding road to get to this day. The delays and postponements due to Covid have given me pause, and I've missed working in person with our group and our teachers. Learning pieces of two parshas has been challenging, to say the least. And it's been an uphill battle, despite my ability to read and speak Hebrew. Chanting from the Torah and Haftorah has been daunting, in part because I don't have much of what Cantor Bear calls "a musical ear". But I've put in the work, and it's finally coming together. I am thrilled to become a Bat Mitzvah with this special group of people. It is truly an honor.

I want to give my heartfelt thanks to Rabbi Hammerman, Cantor Bear and Cantor Kaplan. I could not have done this without your teaching, your support, your encouragement and, most of all, your patience! I have to thank Ben for being there for me in the moments when I was ready to give up — as always, you kept me going. And, thank you for putting up with early or late dinners to accommodate my class schedule. I am grateful to our children, our sisters and brother-in-law, and my friends for listening to me kvetch throughout the past three years, and for urging me on.

Dear Paula,

This day has been a long time coming. With the delays occasioned by Covid and the extended period over which the classes stretched, it would have been so easy to have given up. But you did not. You stuck with it, worked hard and now you have accomplished a difficult and important goal. Our entire family and I are so proud of you.

! כל הכבוד Love, Ben

Dear mom,

I can't believe this day is finally here! For as long as I can remember - even before my own Bat Mitzvah at TBE - you've wanted to have a proper Bat Mitzvah and read from the Torah. I was so proud of you when you signed up for classes and I'm even more proud of you today! In fact, I'd even go as far as saying I'm kvelling. Mazal tov, I love you. \bigcirc Alli

Grandma -- Mazel Tov on your Bat Mitzvah! We are so proud of you for all the hard work and courage you have put into making this day possible. Now that you've mastered the process, we can't wait for you to help us with prep for ours (just 8, 11 and 12 more years for you to get ready!).

We love you - Nate, Freddy, Charlie (and our Mom & Dad, Dani and Josh)

To our "Big Sister" Paula,

When I was little, I looked up to you as my role model. Now that I'm older, nothing has changed! Seeing you on the bimah takes me back to an abundance of sweet memories we have shared and how we have stood by each other amidst the greatest storms and rainbows!

A sister is a forever friend, you can't get rid of me! We are so proud of you once again. The challenges never seem to stop you! Remember, "keep telling the stories." Mazel Tov again.

Love you loads, Linda & Rob

Dear Paula,

You have shown Jewish knowledge, wisdom, and heart all the years I have known and loved you. It is wonderful to see it formally acknowledged with a Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Mazel Tov!!

Love, Jessie

Leslie Heyison - On Becoming a Bat Mitzvah

Since retiring in 2017, I have been reshaping my life in a scattered and random way; dabbling in the arts, cooking, reading, playing sports, working on The Covid Tracking Project, enjoying time with family and friends, volunteering, consulting, and learning more about being a Jew.

While I attended a Hebrew school through Gimmel (at the Orthodox Westville synagogue), as a ten-year old, I had other ideas on how I wanted to spend my time. In those days, few girls became Bat Mitzvahs. I retained the ability to read Hebrew by praying at Temple Beth El-Keser Israel, a Conservative synagogue where my brother became a Bar Mitzvah. In addition, my Mom continued the customs and traditions that kept the family and me connected to Judaism.

Over the past four years, I have attended lectures, read books on Jewish topics, reviewed films for the JCC Film Festival and the like, without a clear roadmap of where I was going. Temple Beth El was part of the "random walk" I was taking. I had more time to actively engage in TBE's programs and activities, making new friends along the way for which I am most grateful. I spent time really listening to Divrei Torah and was awed by the insight and richness of members' commentaries. Working with the accomplished women who participated in Sisterhood Shabbat was especially important in showing me that women of my generation, or thereabouts, did not have to sit on the sidelines in the service. I say "my generation" because women who are much younger, such as my daughter and other teens, have much more knowledge of the service ritualistically and its meaning than I did at their age.

Continuing on my "random walk", in 2018 when TBE offered Adult B'nai Mitzvah classes, I thought that this might help me fulfill a desire that had been simmering for decades to formally become a Bat Mitzvah and fill many of the gaps in my knowledge. A flame inside me was lit and I enrolled to formally become a Bat Mitzvah. I am so looking forward to the end of the "random walk".

To my husband, Joe, thank you for explaining and listening to me rehearse, answering questions, for proofreading this booklet, and for your spiritual example throughout our marriage. Claire and Alex, your example has always been a model for me. In a different way, Shirley (Leslie's Mom), has been a model for me, too.

To my mother, Leslie Heyison, on the day of her B'nai Mitzvah.

Today is in some ways a very special day and in some ways completely ordinary. Today is special in that you complete a milestone in your understanding and connection to the Jewish faith after years of study and introspection. And yet, today is also completely ordinary—just another way among so many that you have modeled for me the value of a lifelong pursuit of learning and self-growth. Congratulations. I am so proud.

Your son, Alex Heyison

P.S I read your D'var Torah. It's lovely and speaks to something foundational that I have learned from you as a parent – that hardships are inevitable, but our ability to interpret and situate our experiences is where we can find meaning in life, in both happiness and struggle.

Mom-

After nearly three years of preparation, the day of your Bat Mitzvah is finally here. I am so impressed by your commitment — as if learning trop and the Torah service weren't difficult enough, you also learned to read two Torah portions and wrote two Divrei Torah. Wow! I hope today's celebrations match up to the immense effort that it took you to get here.

I am so proud of you and so glad to be able to be a part of this milestone. As you know, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is meant to mark the entrance of a person into the Jewish tradition and herald their full participation in their community. Because you have been a part of Jewish life and the Stamford Jewish community for many years, I hope this day instead serves as a reminder of the ways in which Judaism has shaped your life and the lives of those near and dear to you. For starters, you raised Alex and me within the Jewish tradition, supporting us as we reached our B'nai Mitzvah. You've sung in the choir, chaired the Temple Beth El Sisterhood, and are now embarking on documenting the history of Jewish artists in Southern Connecticut. Your ambition and dedication to always learning and doing more has been an inspiration for me, and I can't wait to see what you do next.

Mazal Tov, and may you continue to go from strength to strength.

Love, Claire

To Friends and Family:

Leslie mentions her "random walk" on the way to today's celebration. That grossly understates the enthusiasm and determination that she's manifested in studying, learning and practicing for her role today as a Bat Mitzvah. Leslie's pride in our heritage has carried her through almost three years of work, including starting all over again when the epidemic required the group to postpone the ceremony and study for a new parasha. I'm humbled by the commitment my wife and all the members of the group have shown not only to Jewish ritual and ceremony but also to a deeper understanding of our prayers and Torah. Kol ha'kavod to Leslie and all of today's B'nai Mitzvah.

Love, Joe

Leslie:

Your dream of becoming a Bat Mitzvah has finally arrived. Words cannot express my pride and joy in sharing this momentous occasion with you. Mazel tov and love, as always.

Mom

Pertinent remarks from Donald Halprin's z'l ethical will:

- #1. Always have fun.
- #3. Attempt hard things and don't worry about failing.
- #5. Make time for what matters.

Barbara Rothstein - On Becoming a Bat Mitzvah

It's never too late. Anything worthwhile is worth waiting for. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. These are classic clichés, but all are relevant when describing my journey to becoming Bat Mitzvah.

When comparing today with the traditional age of reaching this milestone, I am fifty years late. I started Hebrew School at the age of nine, but being the only girl in a class of twenty was not fun and so I quit. I really did not give it any thought until my own children were studying for their Bat and Bar Mitzvahs.

I never ask someone to do something that I will not do myself. So when my children were in Hebrew School, I took an adult Hebrew reading class. Due to my less than stellar strength in languages coupled with the lack of necessary time to devote to study, I could not master the skills to read Hebrew and again, I quit. I made another attempt the next time an adult class was offered. The obstacles were the same. Frustrated and tired – I quit again.

Years later and being newly retired, my husband, Steve, and I moved from Long Island to Stamford, and joined Temple Beth El. Once again, a new adult B'nai Mitzvah class began. Despite another cliché, three strikes and you are out, I decided to give it one last try. I was now free from the daily responsibilities of raising children and running my business. This freedom allowed me the time to study, learn and finally succeed at something that escaped me for decades.

I took this journey for myself, but I dedicate it and the lessons I learned to my children Allison (Vlad), Evan (Carol) and our four precious granddaughters – Alexa, Natalie, Emma and Jacqueline.

Shabbat Shalom.

Dear Mom/Grandma,

Congratulations on this major accomplishment. Your dedication to fulfilling this lifelong dream is something to be celebrated. Alexa and Natalie have a great role model in you that has shown that determination and persistence truly pays off! Love,

Allison, Vlad, Alexa and Natalie

Dear Mom,

We are so very proud and excited for you on the day of your Bat Mitzvah. Your journey to this day has been quite the story - and it is one worth reading.

To be of faith is committing to trusting something that you may not necessarily be able to directly see. Having faith is something that we are all challenged with over the course of our lives at many different times and in many different settings. Our faith in one another, our faith in one-self, and our faith in whatever lies ahead is constantly tested.

Know from the bottom of our hearts, that your strength and determination to achieve whatever you put your time and energy towards fuels our belief that we too can achieve the things we want in life. You are an inspiration to us in every way and give us strength.

Mazel Tov to an incredible achievement.

With Much Love and Full Hearts,

Carol, Evan, Emma, & Jacqueline

Dearest Barbara,

With all our love, we wish you Mazel tov on achieving your long-sought goal to become a Bat Mitzvah. You challenged and overcame your preconceived notion that you would never be able to learn to read Hebrew, let alone read Torah. Through your determination, discipline, patience and hours upon hours of studying you have shown us that you can achieve any goal you set for yourself – even ones that you deem to be impossible.

We are all very proud of your achievement today. You have set a wonderful example for our granddaughters, Alexa, Emma, Natalie and Jacqueline to follow. On behalf of the Rothstein and Galperin families' congratulations.

Love.

Steve

Hope Stanger - My Bat Mitzvah Journey

Growing up in an Orthodox family – which would now be referred to as Modern Orthodox, I received so many beautiful gifts in the way of education, rituals and traditions. I attended Hebrew day school, which we called yeshiva, for ten years, where I was immersed in all things Jewish, and studied not only the Hebrew language and the Torah, but the different translations, interpretations and analyses of the Torah, which I loved; later on finding a similarity between those and Shakespeare. We often had Israeli teachers, which enhanced our language capabilities at the time. By the way, if you don't use it, you definitely lose it, and I look forward to one day soon learning Hebrew again so I can speak it the way I used to. We went to shul regularly and observed kashrut, Shabbat and the holidays.

My brothers, who were quite a bit older, had bar mitzvahs and celebrations afterwards, but I was asked if I wanted one. I actually didn't know that it was standard for girls coming from Orthodoxy to be given a choice, but being an adolescent who was not so comfortable in her skin, I gladly opted out. When I discovered B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan and the Conservative movement in my thirties, and paired it with chavurot, a free spirit, love of singing, dancing and music and the Sephardic energy, I found my niche. Friends who had spent time at Eilat Chayyim spiritual retreat center formed a chavurah (which literally means fellowship or gathering of friends) that went on for years with Shabbat dinners, holiday ritual gatherings and leading of seders for others. All of these were filled with ruach, life and the joy of embracing Judaism. I remember a Simchat Torah outside of B'nai Jeshurun, holding the Torah for the first time and dancing in the streets of Manhattan; life changing and soul filling!

Cut to a bit later on, when I joined a chavurah up in Connecticut. The facilitator who started the group was a woman rabbi and singer-songwriter, and we ended up forming a small and intimately connected group of women as our Rosh Chodesh group. She asked me to co-lead High Holiday services with her for her congregation, which I did for two years. The first year was only two months after my dad passed in 2007, and as I sat on the bimah, I had his talit wrapped around me. It was an extraordinary experience for me; it felt like a coming home.

I wanted to find a synagogue up in Connecticut with which I connected on a soul level as I had with B'nai Jeshurun. For many years, that did not happen, though I 'shul-shopped' in a number of congregations. When my dad had passed, I said kaddish once a week between Stamford and Rockland County, as my time was in both places back then. I attended Temple Beth El's morning minyan many times in

those days of weekly kaddish, and I appreciated the warmth and connection that I found in the little sanctuary. Eileen Rosner had my dad's yahrtzeit down even though I was not even a member! Each year, I would show up and bring Beldotti's for breakfast for the minyanaires on his yahrtzeit, as my dad had done in his shul, and I was in disbelief that Eileen had the card with my dad's name in Hebrew and English. I was so touched by this. Thank you, Eileen!

When I met my Beloved Brian in 2016, he was spiritually drawn to converting and becoming a Jew by choice. I knew then it was time to have a spiritual home, and as Brian went to morning minyan as he was in process of conversion, Carol Krim befriended him and made feel so welcome. Hugs to Carol. We both knew we had found our home. We even connected with the Rabbi and Mara at their home for Succot over their new poodle pups and ended up getting our precious Delilah finally this summer from their breeder; a beshert! We also had the first triple aufruf at TBE, and it was incredibly beautiful.

Somehow, we then heard about the newest B'nai Mitzvah group forming three years ago, and as there had not been a group B'nai Mitzvah for nine years, we both said yes. I felt deep inside that it was my time to give myself this gift; the true connection with Hashem and the Torah on a piece I never completed all those years ago. With all the changes that had gone on at the synagogue and then the pandemic, it took our group three years to come to this moment. We even had a different date and parshah picked out, and then changed to Vayeitzei for November 13th. We are so grateful to Cantor Moshe Bear, Rabbi Hammerman and Cantor Katie for their tutelage and guidance.

Our group and journey as upcoming B'nai Mitzvah is so precious, and I am overjoyed and excited for each of us! Mazel Tov to each of you in our group. Your own journey brought you to this moment, too.

Brían Steranka - My Bar Mítzvah Journey

My path to becoming a Jew has been an incredible journey thus far. From the first time I celebrated Shabbat with my soon to be bride Hope Stanger, to the prayers recited at her family's table after Thanksgiving dinner, I was taken with this beautiful religion. I began studying under Rabbi Michael Stanger and while reading about Judaism I found it reflected back at me everything I've ever felt, or yearned for, or simply known about my relationship with God and with the people with whom I share the planet. This is how Hashem found me. To ask me how Judaism lives through me would be incorrect. For I feel as though I live through Judaism. For me it was meaning discovered bit by bit in moments of "doing Jewish to learn Jewish" during my conversion journey, and is continuing moments of insight and inspiration arrived at through living Jewishly. Judaism creates a wholeness in my life in many ways. It offers me a body of prayer that helps me feel grounded and rooted in ancient tradition, yet allows me to express myself and gives me permission to question without guilt or fear.

And now to finally arrive at this point of my Bar Mitzvah it just feels right, by no means makes me complete in my journey, but rather it feels like a new beginning. I am honored to be doing this alongside my wife Hope Stanger and this very fine group of courageous souls who have seen it through its fits and starts to this final point of completion.

Thank to my Mother Emma Steranka who was thrilled from the very first moment she heard I was converting and she has been ever so happy that I get to celebrate and share this journey with Hope. And to my late mother-in-law Claire Stanger who always was and still is in ways with me along for this ride!

Thank you, Rabbi Hammerman for your support and teachings; Cantor Katie Kaplan for your support and guidance. And a special thank you to Cantor Martin Bear who worked tirelessly with me and made me believe (and truly did show me) I could do it!!

L'Shalom

On Hope and Brian Becoming B'nai Mitzvot

What a wonderful mitzvah that Hope and Brian are embarking upon this rite of passage. Hope, a natural scholar and deeply spiritual Jew was not given the opportunity when she was younger to be called to the Torah. Brian, a Jew by choice, chooses to strengthen and deepen his practice.

Hope and Brian so beautifully embody the principles of our faith, avodah (prayer), tikun olam, (healing the world), and tzedakah (acts of kindness). During their mourning for Hope's Mom, Claire and her brother Jordan, they recited kaddish in minyanim to honor both their loved ones and to bring comfort to other mourners. In their work lives Hope and Brian provide support and guidance to their clients. As friends, you won't find anyone more generous or kind. It is an honor to witness their journey!

Jessica, Adam, Brent and Danya wish them so much love, wisdom, and fulfillment on this special day. Mazel Tov!!

D'var Torah by Melody Prenner Bryant



In the well-known parashah, Vayeitze, Jacob has a vivid dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder. This dream is recognized as a pivotal moment for Jacob who affirms his devotion to G-d and journeys to visit his relations in Haran where he finds his beloved Rachel and, by the way, marries Leah as well. There is a moment on his journey before he falls asleep where he selects a stone to use as a pillow of sorts. When he awakens from his remarkable dream, he sets that stone up as a pillar (Genesis 28:18) and pours oil on the top of it. I found this intriguing because I am a collector of stones (or seashells) as a token of a place I have been. And, of course, it is a Jewish tradition that stones are used to honor a visit to a gravesite. Why the emphasis on stones in this parashah? And what role do they serve?

In one interpretation Jacob's gesture teaches us to commemorate memorable experiences in our own lives, pausing to mark them with our own version of Jacob's stones by snapping a photograph, purchasing a postcard or trinket or some other form of remembrance. Another explanation perhaps after the drama of his dream, Jacob found it necessary to do something tangible that would ground him. One can imagine that a dream such as his would cause a version of post-traumatic shock. That he needed to find a physical task to allow himself time for reflection and closure.

In the parashah Jacob declares that the stone shall be G-d's abode (Gen 28:22). In a more prosaic interpretation, it was apparently a common belief among ancient people that gods lived in stones and Jacob may have believed this at the time. In this case his actions may have had no deeper meaning except as an acknowledgement that this could very well be that kind of stone. Interestingly, there appears to be a discrepancy in the language regarding the number of stones.

The parashah reads:

so Jacob "took of the **stones** of that place, and put them at his head, and <u>lay</u> <u>down</u> in that place. Upon awakening Jacob takes "the <u>stone</u> which he had put under his head" and designates it as an altar by pouring oil on it. He then makes a vow... "And this **stone**, which I have erected as a monument, shall be the <u>house</u> of G-d; and all that You give to me, I shall tithe to You."

This begs the question: was it a single stone or several? According to a Midrash Jacob places his head on one specific stone but when he wakens, he finds that the stones have fused into one. The Midrash contends that each of the twelve stones were envious of the one directly beneath Jacob's head. The stones joined into one so that their quarreling would cease. One could interpret this as a sign of the importance of community; that there is inherent strength in melding individual perspectives into one and that in the words of one rabbi "unity forges tolerance".

The existence of stones in this parshah does not end there. Once Jacob arrives in Haran, he notices a well and he queries the resident shepherds in his quest to locate Laban. As was the custom, there was a stone over the mouth of the well. Once the flocks were gathered, the shepherds would roll the stone away and water the sheep. Rachel arrives and Jacob is immediately enamored with her.

"And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother". (Genesis 29:10)

Rabbi Darrell Ginsberg provides a practical interpretation of these events. Unknown in Haran, Jacob would have been concerned that he be perceived as a person of importance – Laban was a distinguished citizen of Haran and Jacob was sent by his mother to find a wife within Laban's family. Jacob seized on the opportunity to impress Rachel, the shepherds and ultimately Laban by this demonstration of strength. This single feat would garner Jacob instant fame which would be appealing to a man of Laban's station. And as we read, the plan was successful. The Chasidic commentator Sefat Emet viewed the stone at the well as a barrier which must be removed with great effort in order that one find the inner meaning of his or her deeds.

The irony of the tale is that more than seven hundred years elapsed before Jacob's vision would be fulfilled. It is said that King Solomon built the Holy Temple on that mountain and placed the holy ark on the stone where Jacob had rested. The significance for me is that stones are enduring, they can be obstacles to be moved or foundations to be built on but either way they mark our journey through life in much the same way they marked Jacob's.

Shabbat Shalom

D'var Torah by Fran Ginsburg

I love reading Genesis. The good, the bad, the pure faith, the evil, the upright and the fallen. This is the greatest soap opera of all time. It moves so quickly!

In this week's portion we go all the way from Jacob's journey and dream—which reads almost like he ingested some magic mushrooms on his trip--through more than two decades under his father-in-law's thumb and back again. The themes discussed are innumerable—unlike in later parshas when we may spend the whole week—or more—on the minutiae of how to build the Ark of the Covenant, for example.

Having spent my entire life as a feminist and my entire career treating infertility, some of the things I could discuss seem obvious. I decided, however, that I would try to find meaning in the actual lines I was assigned. When we get to Genesis 31:51, Jacob already has 12 children (Benjamin not yet born) with his 2 wives and 2 concubines and is feeling very exploited. He wants to take his livestock and go back home. Laban, who is both his uncle and father-in-law ostensibly wants to protect his daughters, but really wants his animals back, even though Jacob was the one who was able to increase the flock so dramatically. This is a far cry from the start of the parsha, after Jacob helped Rachel at the well, when Laban enthusiastically offered him a job with wages--and both his daughters. As an aside, Rachel and Leah, who are bitter rivals for most of the story, agree with Jacob that it is time to go—seeing that the exit is the only way, as women, to hang on to any part of Laban's estate.

The animosity between Jacob and Laban is extreme, but they try to be cordial and Laban decides that they should stay apart by building a pillar and a "heap." As Robert Frost wrote, "Good fences make good neighbors." Their differences are still obvious, however, as each one seals the covenant to respect the territory of the other by calling upon their gods. Laban, a descendent of Nahor, calls upon the deity worshipped by his family as well as upon the God worshipped by Jacob's. Jacob solely "swore by the Fear," or God, of his father, Isaac. Then, of course, they have a meal together.

There are so many nuances to this story. Laban is a tyrant, but family is family, after all, and Jacob doesn't want a complete break from Laban, presumably for his wives' sake. Also, making Laban an enemy would not bode well for the future. There are plenty of other battles coming up.

In this day, we, too, face the dilemma of fences—and how fluid the travel through them should be. The border wall with Mexico comes to mind, but so do the borders between the Palestinians and Israelis. How much of a barrier can we put up, and should we be able to cross that barrier for better understanding of each other?

I spent much of Covid editing our Sisterhood cookbook, and I love the idea of food as a way to nurture family and friends. One of my favorite cookbooks is *Jerusalem*, by Yotam Ottolenghi, a Jew who lives in England, but whose family got there from Italy by way of Israel, and Sami Tamimi, who grew up in Muslim East Jerusalem but only met Yotam in London. Their beautiful book tells the story of how we have co-existed in a city with 4,000 years of history. It has recipes for humus and latkes, borekas and babkes. It is also blatantly not kosher, which might offend many, but the point is that we can bind over food.

Maybe fences are important, but, in this dangerous age, it is more important to find ways to co-exist and thrive. Being able to respect each other's differences and rejoice in our similarities is a start.

D'var Torah by Leslie Heyison

In this week's Parashah Vayeitzei, Jacob flees from his father's camp afraid that his brother, Esau, will take revenge, possibly killing him, for stealing his birthright. Jacob stops for the night and falls asleep with a stone pillow under his head, before heading onto his uncle Laban's household in Haran. While asleep,

"...he, dreamed and behold, a ladder stationed on the earth and its top reaches the sky, and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, God stands above it ...(Genesis 28:12-13)"

A common interpretation of Jacob's dream is that the ladder links heaven and earth and the angels represent men and women's ascending up as they are inspired by the Torah, and then descending to relay understanding to others for the betterment of the world.

I would like to propose another interpretation, after reading "Climbing the Ladder" by Alan Morinis. In the book, Morinis describes his personal journey learning about the Mussar Jewish spiritual movement that he hopes will help him overcome his despair and confusion.

The Mussar movement, which arose in 19th-century Lithuania and still exists today, offers an alternative for those who want to live a more meaningful and ethical spiritual life by actively cultivating inner virtues rather than merely following the "rules".

Why do I think Mussar is relevant to Jacob's dream? Because Jacob's ladder is a symbol of Jacob's personal development and inner growth. Let me explain.

While in Haran, Jacob met Rachel, fell in love and asked her father, his uncle Laban, if he could marry her. Laban agreed, but then deceived Jacob by substituting his older daughter, Leah, on the wedding night. Jacob realized what had happened the next morning, only after the marriage had been consummated. Long story short, Jacob ended up working for Laban for fourteen years to win the right to marry Rachel, and then another six years to build his "nest egg" - his flock and family - before sneaking out of town, and heading back to Canaan.

Enduring Laban's deceptions may have been the character-building life experience that Jacob needed to realize the immorality of deceiving his brother Esau. Jacob could then approach Esau with humility and brotherly love as he sought forgiveness for his deception twenty years earlier.

How does he do this? When Jacob heads back to Canaan, he sends out emissaries to Esau with a conciliatory message. Jacob learns from his emissaries that Esau still plans to attack him and his family. What does Jacob do? He sends a tribute to his brother and asks for forgiveness:

"Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats; two hundred ewes and twenty rams;" (Genesis 32:14-15) and so on ... "Then he, himself (Jacob), went on ahead of them and bowed earthbound seven times until he reached his brother. Esau ran toward him, embraced him, fell upon his neck and kissed him; then they wept." (Genesis 33:3-4)

Jacob has, indeed, ascended the ethical ladder to reunite with his brother and achieve the necessary holiness to assume the role of patriarch of Israel.

As a personal parallel, my becoming a Bat Mitzvah today is an important step on my personal spiritual ladder, in this case a three-year climb. It was important for me to feel more of a connection to my children, Claire and Alex, and my husband, Joe, by learning more about Jewish history, learning tropes, Torah and Haftarah portions and writing a D'var Torah. Also, while the pandemic created frustrating challenges, notably changing the date and meeting on Zoom rather than in-person, and getting to know eight beautiful, soulful B'nai Mitzvah colleagues.

I want to thank Cantor Bear for his superb instruction and Rabbi Ginsburg for helping me with my D'var Torah

Thank you, Rabbi Ginsburg for guiding me as I wrote my very first D'var Torah and Cantor Bear for your effective Torah and Haftorah instruction. Deepest thanks to Rabbi Hammerman for all of those contextual history lessons from long, long ago, and Cantor Kaplan for your glowing spirit coaxing and steering us along.

So that my journey doesn't end here, my personal mitzvah in the coming years will be to read from the Torah twice a year.

Shabbat Shalom

D'var Torah by Barbara Rothstein

Today's portion, Vayeitzei, comes from the book of Genesis and tells us about Jacob's leaving his home and his travels to Haran. One night during his journey he has a dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder that reaches from Earth to Heaven. Upon his arrival in Haran he sees Rachel and immediately knows he wants to marry her. He begins working for his Uncle Laban with the promise that after seven years of work he would be allowed to marry Laban's daughter, Rachel. As we know, Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his other daughter, Leah. Jacob did not give up hope or the desire to marry Rachel. He agreed to work another seven years in order to marry his true love. In addition, he works six more years in order to build his assets and be able to provide for his family. Finally, after twenty years of work he fulfills his dreams and desire to be with his wife Rachel and their family.

There are many interpretations of Vayeitzei and many lessons learned from it. I see Jacob's dream of angels ascending and descending the ladder that is firmly planted on Earth and reaching up to Heaven as a metaphor for the trials and tribulations that we all experience during our lifetime. No one is on a straight-line trajectory to success. Life is a winding road with many bumps and falls along the way. Those who have their feet firmly planted, just as the ladder in Jacob's dream was planted in the earth, have the drive to get up, brush themselves off and try again to reach whatever the goal might be.

The lesson I learned from today's portion, Vayeitzei, and applied to my studies is to never feel limited in aspirations or abilities. We must always believe that we have the inner strength to succeed. Just as Jacob had the perseverance to work twenty years to achieve his goal, we must remember that very few things in life come quickly or without some sacrifice. The more effort we put into things, the sweeter the reward.