



Thoughts on the Merger - Rabbi's Message



Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein

I must admit that I was shocked when I was first approached about the possibility of a merger between Temple Sinai and Temple Beth Am. I had heard through the grapevine about the failed merger talks between Temple Beth Zion and Temple Beth Am and I wondered how this would be different. On paper, we are very different congregations, with Temple Beth Am being more than double our size and part of the Reform movement. However, despite this, I knew that it was in Temple Sinai's best interests to at least listen to the proposal and go from there.

Over the past year, I have been very impressed with the kindness and compassion shown during what we have called the "merger talks." The leadership of both Temple Beth Am and Temple Sinai have worked incredibly hard to really listen to one another and to create a shared vision together. There have been stumbling blocks along the way, from small things like the language used in the first letter about the merger, to big things like where the merged congregation would be housed. And through it all, the process has been transparent, honest, and incredibly hopeful.

Both Temple Sinai and Temple Beth Am recognize that the Jewish landscape of Western New York is undergoing a seismic shift. We are no longer a community of 25,000 households. We are no longer a community of even 15,000 households. Just in the past ten years alone, Temple Sinai has seen its membership drop by almost fifty percent. And while much of this attrition has been due to normal loss, i.e. congregants dying or moving, there are simply not enough new Jewish souls in the area to make up for the continued shrinking of our Buffalo Jewish community.

Practically, this has meant a huge decrease in the number of people attending our Friday night and High Holiday services, and an equally important decrease in volunteer energy and programming capability. From my vantage point, as rabbi of this proud, historic congregation, we can continue to watch our numbers go down and plan for the day when Temple Sinai will be no more, or we can look to take bold steps to ensure the future of our community.

The merger proposal that you will be voting on at the end of March

is such a bold step. It is not an easy decision; merging, changing our name, changing our location — all will be difficult things to swallow. No one can guarantee that the transition will be smooth or that the ongoing process will be without bumps and bruises. But you can be assured that many good people put in a lot of time and energy to ensure that the Temple Sinai spirit will be present in the new institution.

While I will not be voting, I, along with the rest of the staff of Temple Sinai, will be greatly impacted by the final decision. I love working in my current position. I love Temple Sinai. We have a great board, a great staff, and a great community. I so much appreciate the love and support Temple Sinai members have shown me and the rest of the staff during the merger talks.

Ultimately, though, the decision is yours. Weigh the pros and cons, ask your questions, think about our future, and, most importantly, attend the March meeting. I am committed to helping in whatever way I can, whatever ends up being decided.

B'Hatzlacha, Good luck. And please remember, my door is always open if you want to drop by.

B'Shalom,
Rabbi Alex

Temple Sinai's celebration of its 60th anniversary continues! For more photos, see pages 3 & 6.



3/3/72 - Temple Sinai Youth Orchestra performing in the social hall. Seated L-R: Judith Cohen, Ilana Krop, Daniel Goldstein, Lori Krop, Jan Rosenbaum, Marc Goldstein, Eric Rosenbaum, name unknown and Justin Cohen. Standing far right: Abe Cohen and David Cohen. (Our apologies for those not noted by name.)



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President's Message - Merge Update 2012



Jill Hamilton

As I write this, the merger's governance subcommittee has just put the finishing touches on the proposed bylaws for the congregation that would be formed if the congregations of Temple Sinai and Temple Beth Am vote to merge. We have worked very hard to ensure that Temple Sinai truly has an equal role in the new congregation. We want our members' voices to be heard, and want you to be properly represented by the board members elected to serve you.

To that end, the following has been proposed:

For the first two years of operation, seats on the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee will be equally divided between members of the former Beth Am and members of the former Temple Sinai. A member of the former Beth Am will serve as president for the first year, and a member of the former Sinai (most likely yours truly) will be vice president of administration. Those two individuals will switch roles the second year. That equal distribution system will terminate in the third year, but the board nominating committee will be made up of half members of the former Beth Am and half members of the former Sinai. The committee has also worked to resolve any differences between the two temples with regard to governance and general policies.

We have looked at the role of non-Jews in the congregation, and the differing committee structures of the two temples. The bylaws have now been edited and approved by all members of the subcommittee, and are being passed to the merger steering committee for further feedback. Eventually, they will be reviewed by the board, and available to the congregation as a whole. At its next meeting, the governance subcommittee plans to examine the written policies (specific policies passed by the board at various times, but not part of the bylaws) of both temples to determine if there are differences that need to be reconciled.

Additionally, Temple Sinai's board has begun to look more closely at our endowment. When we began talking with Temple Beth Am, one of the things that we required they agree to was that our endowment would, "remain for the purposes for which it was originally intended." However, now that it appears the merger may actually come to fruition, we needed to figure out how to best honor the spirit and intent of those who donated money to our endowment. Many funds within the endowment have specific restrictions, and we want to make sure these restrictions are observed as closely as possible. A small committee was formed within the board, and recommendations are being generated for how the endowment funds should be restricted within the merger agreement. We will make this information available to you when it is finalized.

At Temple Sinai's December focus groups, several people raised questions regarding how much the general membership of Temple Beth Am knows about the proposed merger. Recently, a very detailed letter was sent to all of the members of Temple Beth Am, making very clear that this is a true merger, and not just the absorption of Temple Sinai by Temple Beth Am. The letter outlined the progress made by each subcommittee, and the policies and practices that are being proposed which you can read in the excerpt of the letter included below.

A Temple Beth Am Town Hall meeting took place late January, and their leaders will also be meeting with many of the interest groups (such as Sisterhood, Men's Group, and PTA), to ensure that their members are well informed prior to the vote. Although there are sure to be "bumps" along the way, we feel that if everyone understands what has been proposed, there will be fewer uncomfortable surprises when we come together.

As always, please contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns you may have.

**Jill Hamilton,
Temple Sinai President**

The following is excerpted from a letter that was recently sent to the membership of Temple Beth Am regarding the merger process. If you missed our focus groups, it is a good update on where things stand with our merger talks. Please note that although Temple Beth Am is not holding focus groups, as we did, they will be holding another town hall meeting this month, and their steering committee members will be attending the meetings of various interest groups within Temple Beth Am to ensure that their members are well-informed prior to the merger vote.

Considerable progress has been made in our merger talks [with Temple Sinai]. While much refining still needs to be done, tentative plans have been reached for the smooth blending of our prayer services and religious practices, joint financial operations, governance, religious school operations and facility use. As a result, our target date for the merger is now June of 2012 rather than the fall of 2012. Regardless of the ultimate timing, we assure you that no merger plans will be presented to the congregation until we have carefully and thoroughly considered and agreed to all key elements of the proposal. The proposed merger would require a two-thirds affirmative vote of Temple

Beth Am members attending a congregational meeting. Temple Sinai has a similar requirement.

It is crucial to remember that what we are proposing is a true merger, and not merely the addition of new members from Temple Sinai. The new, combined temple's identity will blend both Reform and Reconstructionist traditions, which are remarkably similar in most respects. The few differences which must be bridged will, we firmly believe, add richness and diversity to the new entity without requiring dramatic or disruptive change. For example, Shabbat services will be held both Friday evening and Saturday morning, and we are working to find creative ways to infuse each service with elements of the other. Family services and Torah study sessions will continue, and lay participation in services will be encouraged. All clergy and staff members from both existing temples will be retained. Sharon Jacobs will continue to lead the [Temple Beth Am] religious school, and Sinai students (there are about 15 of them) will have the option of continuing to attend classes at Gesher, as they do now, or taking part in the Sheridan Drive program.

Continued on page 3



Temple Sinai 20th Anniversary Dinner - Photo of Past Presidents
 First row L-R: Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, President of JRF and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Leonard Goodman, Ruth Goldman, Edith Goldstein and Louis Borin
 Back row L-R: David Feld, Elliott Shapiro, Marty Wolpin, David Busch, Harold Axlerod, Louis Bunis, and Rabbi Joseph D. Herzog

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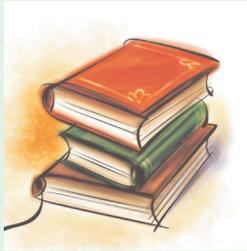
by Leslie Jaszczak

Many Sinai parents have benefited from the warm and wise child-rearing advice given by psychologist Wendy Mogel in *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*. For those facing the challenges presented by older children, Dr. Mogel has written *The Blessing of a B Minus: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Resilient Teenagers*, recently acquired by the temple library.

Adolescence, as Dr. Mogel explains, is a trying time not only socially but also emotionally, involving changes even in the structure of the brain. Teenagers are attempting to separate from their parents but also need a safe harbor to which to return. The difficulty for parents, as she sees it, is maintaining the balancing act of being there for their children but also allowing them to fail and take the consequences when necessary.

The Blessing of a B Minus examines eight areas of teenage behavior, giving common-sense advice on how to deal with issues such as rudeness, bad judgment, sex and substance abuse, as well as accepting the “unique glory” of your child’s individuality, even when it differs from your own expectations, and modeling the type of behavior you expect from him or her. Helpful ideas from Jewish tradition, such as shalom bayit (peace in the home) and Talmudic stories are woven in with the latest psychological insights.

If you are the parent (or grandparent) of a teenager, or if your child is approaching his or her teenage years, *The Blessing of a B Minus* will provide you with some much-needed perspective and guidance on navigating this often trying period with grace and balance.



Temple Beth Am membership update, continued from page 2

Finances will get a major boost, allowing the combined temple to focus its attention more fully on spiritual and communal matters. And new by-laws will ensure an equal Beth Am/Sinai representation among officers and on the Board of Trustees for two years.

As we have stated previously, the combined temple will be housed at [Temple Beth Am’s] present Sheridan Drive location, and Temple Sinai’s Alberta Drive building will be put up for sale only after — and if -- its membership formally approves the merger. Proceeds from the sale of the Alberta Drive facility will be used only for special purposes (building improvements, perhaps) and not for operating expenses. A budget deficit is anticipated only in the first year of the merger because of moving expenses, and because the temple will employ two rabbis. (Rabbi Irwin Tanenbaum will retire in July of 2013, and Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein, now at Temple Sinai, is under contract until July of 2014). Healthy surpluses are anticipated beginning in the second year of operation, a major improvement over many recent years. Because the dues policies of Beth Am and Sinai are very similar, they will remain in effect.

For the first two years of operation, seats on the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee will be equally divided between members of the former Beth Am and members of the former Temple Sinai. A member of the former Beth Am will serve as president for the first year, and a member of the former Sinai will be vice president of administration. Those two individuals will switch roles the second year. That equal distribution system will terminate in the third year, but the board nominating committee will be made up of half members of the former Beth Am and half members of the former Sinai . The Governance Committee will also examine the written policies of both temples to determine if there are differences that need to be reconciled.

Interfaith weddings may be performed at temple at the discretion of individual clergy members. Non-Jewish members will be allowed to participate fully in all aspects of temple life, with these exceptions: they may not chair the Worship (Ritual and Liturgy) or Education committees or serve as temple officers. They may serve as board members only with prior approval of the Executive Committee, a condition not required for Jewish board members. Kosher style meals will continue to be used for synagogue events, and accommodations will be made in the kitchen to satisfy requests for kosher meals.

The temple will take on a new name, which has not yet been chosen.

Many members of both temples have worked hard – and in an atmosphere of cooperation and trust – to craft a structure that we are confident will provide substantial benefits, innovations and security for many years to come. We will continue to keep you posted on our progress.

Shalom,

Todd Sugarman
Temple Beth Am President

Gesher School News...

by Einav Symons

The Gesher students had a busy January. Chana Kotzin visited our school and spoke to the students about Jewish Buffalo. Grades 5-7 had their Family Education Brunch and Learn. We had a wonderful Shabbat service at Temple Sinai. Gesher students were visited by the Amherst police and learned about safety. Our grades 5-7 students were enlightened by Jay Mesnekoff about Jewish funerals as part of our life-cycle curriculum.

In February, Gesher students are participating in a Tu B'Shevat program with Temple Beth Zion on February 5.

On February 12, World Wide Wrap is taking place. This is a day for learning about T'fillin and how to wear them. Temple Beth Tzedek Brotherhood has bought each of the students in grades 5-7 their own kit for making T'fillin. This craft will greatly enhance the program.

I hope you have each received the annual invitation to Gesher's wine tasting Havdallah on February 11 at 7-9. Please RSVP early.

Finally, please mark your calendars for the first community Purim carnival on Sunday March 4 at Temple Beth Am. We hope to see you there.

Mitzvah Projects....

Claire Mutka, who celebrated her bat mitzvah on Saturday, January 14, invites you to contribute to her Mitzvah Project:

For my Mitzvah Project, I will be working with chronically ill pediatric patients at Women and Children's Hospital of Buffalo. I will be helping at "Stone's Buddies" parties and support group events for this population and their families. I am also collecting small toys for use in the ICU. Items can be dropped off at our home or brought to Temple where there is a collection box. The following items are needed.

Baby rattles, Find It/ Shake It, Hand held games, Legos - all ages, Uno card games, Puzzle books, 100 piece puzzles, I Spy books (or other similar), Felt posters w/ markers

For more information visit stonesbuddies.org

Celebrate Israel - In Buffalo! Israel @ 64

This April marks the 64th anniversary of Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948. A celebration of Israel's Yom Ha'Atzmaut will commence with a Gala on the evening of Thursday, April 26, at the newly remodeled Statler Ballroom, and will continue with a festival on Sunday, April 29. Both events are non-denominational and open to all who would like to celebrate Israel. www.buffalo4israel.com

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MAZEL TOV

Claire Mutka on her Bat Mitzvah
 Brenda Freedman and Martin Mutka on the Bat Mitzvah of
 their daughter Claire

CONDOLENCES

Stephanie Shapiro on the loss of her husband Elliot Shapiro
 The family of Estelle Deemer

Celebration? Honor? In Memory?

Donations can be made at any time of day at
www.templesinaibuffalo.org

<p>Congratulations to our Chai Club Winners!</p> <p>Tickets are still available - please call the office at: 834-0708 or stop by and pick up your lucky tickets this week. Great gift idea too!</p>	<p>Week #7 - Winners \$18 Lisa Bojarski \$36 to Harriet Rosenfeld \$54 to Marcy Unher</p>	<p>Week #9 Winners \$18 for Tina Ferber \$36 for Jered Geist \$54 for Anthony Urciuoli</p>	<p>Week #11 Winners \$18 for Carole Bingert \$36 for David Grayck \$54 for Murray Ettinger</p>
	<p>Week #8 - Winners \$18 for Abe Rosenberg \$36 for Joyce Berg \$54 for Maude Dull</p>	<p>Week #10 Winners \$18 for Nick Kurke \$36 for Judith Olin \$54 for Joe Glickman</p>	<p>Will You Be the Next Winner?</p>

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Please see weekly email updates and online calendar or call the office at 716-834-0708 for details.

- Rabbi Alex's office hours**, Thursdays at 3pm
- Shabbat Magic Potluck Dinner**, Friday, February 3, at 5:30 pm,
- Tot Shabbat** at 6 pm, Family Shabbat Service at 7 pm
- Finance Meeting**, Tuesday, February 7, 2012 at 6:45 pm
- Board Meeting**, Tuesday, February 7, 2012 at 7:30 pm
- Rit & Lit Meeting**, Tuesday, February 14, at 7 pm
- Ruach Book Group Meeting**, Thursday, February 23, at 1:30 p.m.
- Purim Spiel Rehearsals**, Sundays at 1 pm
- Ruach Event**, Saturday, February 25, 7 pm

Weekly Schedule of Services:

- Shabbat Service**, Fridays, 7:30 pm (Family Services on first Friday of month at 7:00 pm; Tots at 6:00 pm)
- Shacharit Service**, Saturdays, 10:00 am (unless noted above)
- Beit Midrash Torah Study**, Saturdays, 11:00 am (at 9:30 am on day of B'nei Mitzvah)



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