

June 2012 • Sivan/Tammuz 5772



# SINAI DIALOGUE



Rabbi Alex  
Lazarus-Klein

## Rabbi's Message - Stirring the Pot

For most of the 20th century, Mordecai Kaplan served as the homiletics professor for the Jewish Theological Seminary. This meant that he was in charge of teaching “practical rabbinics” (i.e. how to speak, how to counsel) to several generations of Conservative rabbis. As the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, he loved to stir the pot, so at the beginning of every year he would purposely write “G-O-D” on the board, without the dash in the middle. One or more students would notice this, stand up and berate Kaplan for being disrespectful toward the almighty. Kaplan would simply erase “G-O-D” and put “P-R” dash “C-E-S-S,” thus demonstrating how vital process was in his vision of Judaism.

I tell this story in my final Dialogue column before our community, together with Temple Beth Am, transforms itself into Congregation Shir Shalom, to kvell about the wonderful process that led to the successful merger vote. As the rabbi of Temple Sinai, I was able to see all the inner discussions and dialogue that went into making this a reality. I saw people in both congregations approaching potentially challenging points of contention with love and respect. I saw the group of twenty or so people most actively involved come together as one family.

The proudest moment for me was the merger vote itself, when the more than one hundred Temple Sinai members gathered in our sanctuary on that fateful Tuesday night gave our president, Jill Hamilton a standing ovation. With all the hard work she personally put in, taking time away from her family and her work, I was overwhelmed with emotion to see her being honored in such a loving fashion. And, then later that night, at our “after-party” celebration with members of both merger committees gathered at the Westwood to celebrate, one of the Temple Beth Am board members spoke about how his participation in the talks was the most meaningful governance activity he had taken part in after decades of long service to the Jewish community.

Make no mistake, this was not an easy decision and it was not a fait accompli until the vote actually went through. This is also not the end to our work of successfully combining two congregations. It is my goal, and I know it is the goal of Rabbi Tanenbaum and Cantor Colbert, as well as the rest of the staff and lay leaders, to make sure this process continues in the same way that it began, with love, respect and patience. Over the next year, we will

discover a lot about each of our individual institutions and about ourselves. We have an opportunity to take the best of what our two proud communities have to offer and create a new and exciting synagogue that will proudly be called Congregation Shir Shalom!

The keys will be openness on both sides, a willingness to experiment, a willingness to listen, and a willingness to make mistakes. Toes will inevitably be stepped on, we will feel unwelcome, they will feel unwelcome, but we will work through these things just like the merger committee worked through things - and in the end we will make this endeavor a success.

Please join me in this holy process.

**B'Shalom,  
Rabbi Alex**



*Save the date!!*

*Saturday, July 21, 2012*

*Temple Sinai 60th Anniversary Gala*

*50 Alberta Drive*

*Party begins at 6 p.m. with cocktails*

*Dinner & dancing, music & musings,  
silliness and celebrations.*

*Please get involved!*

*Contact Michael Rosenberg at  
drrosenberg@roadrunner.com or  
Marina Finkelstein at mfnkl@aol.com  
to help with planning or to include your  
sponsorship in program book.*

*More details to follow!  
Hope to see you there!*

## President's Message



Jill Hamilton

**What a whirlwind few months these have been!** The hard work of the merger steering committee over the last year or so culminated in a powerful vote in favor of the merged Congregation Shir Shalom. As I have said to a number of people since then, I thought there would be a lull after the vote and before the work of actually putting the merger into effect – but there was no lull! A number of committees and individuals are already hard at work on the transition to Congregation Shir Shalom, which will officially take place July 1st.

The building committee has been busy negotiating with brokers and evaluating offers on the building, as well as beginning to take an inventory of the equipment, books, artwork, and other items in both buildings, to determine what we will bring with us, and where it will be placed. Our goal is to create an environment in which legacy Temple Sinai members can feel “at home” as soon as they walk into the building. We also hope to be able to consider some modifications to the space that would create something new for the merged congregation.

Todd Sugarman and I have begun meeting with the clergy and office staff. Plans for the first few months of services are well under way, and work has begun on programming for High Holidays. In addition, Temple Sinai's Ritual and Liturgy committee is giving careful thought to our last few services at Sinai, to properly mark

the occasion. They are also planning a special ceremony for bringing our Torahs to their new home.

The two office staffs have begun to define their roles, and figure out how they will work together. The committees of Temple Sinai and Temple Beth Am have begun to talk to one another as well, and we are working to coordinate the temple calendar, so that each group is able to sponsor the events that they usually do with a minimum of conflicts, overlap or redundancy.

Although we are moving as quickly as possible, I would ask that you PLEASE BE PATIENT with us. It will take some time, and maybe some trial and error, to really get things right. My husband pointed out that when you're driving a route to work every day, and there's construction that slows traffic, it's very frustrating. You have to wait, or be re-routed, and it takes you longer to get to work. Maybe you have to leave home earlier to get to work on time, or you have to take a different route. Maybe it seems like they're not going about the construction in the most efficient manner possible. But then, one day it's done – and you have a new, smooth road to drive on. The lighting is better, and you can navigate more safely and comfortably. You have something good, and it turns out that it was worth the wait. I'm sure that we will have detours and frustrations as we begin this temple journey together – but in the end, we will have a wonderful, vibrant new congregation, unlike anything that has come before it.

**Jill Hamilton,  
Temple Sinai President**

### Looking back on Temple Sinai as we look forward....



First Shabbat Kiddush, Temple Sinai

**Many thanks to Janet Slonim for providing an abundance of rich history this year through archival photos. Thanks also to all the contributors of our Sinai Dialogue - including editors and proofreaders! You help us stay in touch with our community and your efforts are very much enjoyed and appreciated.**



Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan and Rabbi Nathan Gaynor at Temple services.

## RELIGIOUS SCHOOL UPDATE

With the merging of our congregation, some parents have asked about where their children will attend religious school. According to our consolidation agreement, families wishing to stay with Gesher School, particularly those with older children who have been in Gesher all along, may do so.

Parents who wish to enroll their children in the new Shir Shalom school can also do so, as well as take advantage of the early bird discount, for those who send in their registration forms for the 2012-2013 school year by June 29, 2012. For more information, please contact Sharon Jacobs at 633-8953, or email her at [tbaReligiousSchool@BethAmBuffalo.org](mailto:tbaReligiousSchool@BethAmBuffalo.org).

Temple typically subsidizes a portion of the cost of children attending religious school. The tuition paid by families does not cover the full cost of religious school education. Congregation Shir Shalom will continue to pay the temple portion of the cost for children either remaining at the Gesher School or attending the school at Shir Shalom, so the cost for families will remain the regular "temple member" tuition at either school.

### Help us name our new Congregation Shir Shalom newsletter!

Members of Temple Sinai and Temple Beth Am are invited to submit suggestions for the name of our newly merged Congregation Shir Shalom newsletter.



#### Got a great name?

Please send your newsletter name suggestions, by June 15, to:  
Jordana, at [jordanahalperngeist@gmail.com](mailto:jordanahalperngeist@gmail.com)  
Sharlene, at [sbadback@gmail.com](mailto:sbadback@gmail.com)  
(or 634-1106)

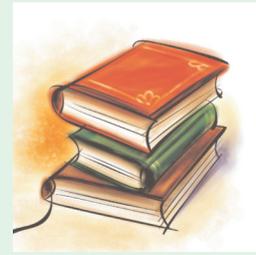
You can also mail your suggestions to Temple Sinai, 50 Alberta Drive, Amherst, NY, 14226 or Temple Beth Am, 4660 Sheridan Drive, Williamsville, NY, 14221, by June 15.

The Communications Committee will review all of the suggested names, and then the committee members, together with our Temple Presidents, Jill Hamilton and Todd Sugarman, will select the name for the newsletter. (Sometime after that, a new design for the newsletter will be developed, but we need a name first.)

**Thank you for your patience as our congregations work through the many details of this exciting merger, set to take place July 1.**

## LIBRARY CORNER

by Leslie Jaszczak

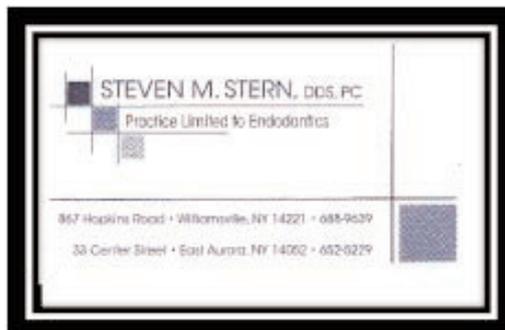


In 1972 Sally Priesand, ordained by Hebrew Union College, was hailed as the first female rabbi in history. While her achievement was certainly historic, she did, however, have a predecessor. Thirty-seven years earlier, a young woman named Regina Jonas had received her rabbinic diploma in Berlin. Her life is at last rescued from obscurity in *Fräulein Rabbinder Jonas: The Story of the First Woman Rabbi* by Elisa Klapheck, which can be found in the biography section of the temple library.

Klapheck begins her book with a short chapter called "My Journey Toward Regina Jonas," in which she recounts the discovery of Jonas' papers in the East German archives after the fall of the Berlin Wall, her examination of them, and the strong passions, both pro and con, that the achievements of this remarkable woman aroused even close to half a century after her death at the hands of the Nazis. She also talks of the personal influence Jonas' story had on her, from the writing of this book to her own ordination just before its publication in the US.

Unfortunately, the documentation of Jonas' life, particularly her early years, is relatively sparse, but Klapheck does an impressive job bringing to life an intelligent woman with a fierce commitment to Judaism and a passionate dedication to achieving her goal of becoming a rabbi. Refusing to flee Germany, she remained to minister to the dwindling Jewish community, first in Berlin and then in Theresienstadt, before being deported to Auschwitz and killed there with her mother.

The last section of the book is a translation of Jonas' halachic treatise, "Can Women Serve as Rabbis?" This may not be of interest to the general reader, but its arguments are the same ones used to enable the ordination of female rabbis to this day.



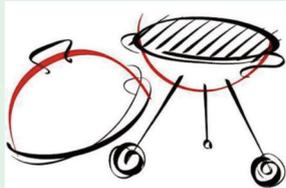
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Jordana Halpern Geist and Robert Geist on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Benjamin  
Elaine & Andy Green on the birth of their new grandson Levi Reed Gartman  
Alva & Nate Finkelstein on the birth of their new great-grandson Levi Reed Gartman  
Marina & Mark Finkelstein on the birth of their new great-nephew Levi Reed Gartman

### CONDOLENCES

The family of Kelly Moore  
Beth Marcus on the loss of her mother Ceil Balber

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Please see weekly email updates and online calendar at [templesinaibuffalo.org](http://templesinaibuffalo.org) or call the office at 716-834-0708 for details.

- Rabbi Alex's office hours, Thursdays, 1:30 pm
- Tot Shabbat, 6 pm, Family Service, 7 pm, Friday, June 1
- BBQ Potluck, Friday, June 8, 5:30 pm
- Ruach Meeting, Sunday, June 3, 10 am
- Finance Meeting, Tuesday, June 5, 6:45 pm
- Board Meeting, Tuesday, June 5, 7:30
- Bar Mitzvah of Benjamin Geist, Saturday, June 16, 10:30 am



### Weekly Schedule of Services:

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

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