MARCH AT SHAARE TEFILA

SERVICES
Shacharit: Monday & Thursday: 8:00 am
       Sunday and Federal Holidays: 8:45 am
Maariv: Sunday - Thursday: 7:30 pm

Rabbi Layman’s Classes
Torah: Friday at 9:30 am  Talmud: Sunday at 9:30 am

Shabbat Services
Friday: 6:00 pm  Saturday: 9:20 am

Wednesday, March 1
6:00 pm Family Yoga Event w/Gates of Discovery Preschool

Friday, March 3
6:00 pm Instrumental Shabbat Service with Sally Heckelman
7:00 pm Shabbat Dinner

Saturday, March 4
9:00 am Torah study w/Rabbi Layman

Sunday, March 5
9:30 am Chavaya and Café Shaare Tefila
10:00 am It’s Academic: Men’s Club vs Sisterhood
10:00 am Gan Katan
10:30 am Hebrew Conversation Group
12:30 pm Purim Shpiel rehearsal

Wednesday, March 8
10:00 am Men’s Discussion Group
7:45 pm “Contemporary Jewish Issues” with Rabbi Layman

Saturday, March 11
9:00 am Torah study w/Rabbi Layman
6:00 pm Purim Megillah reading

Sunday, March 12 - PURIM
9:30 am Chavaya and Café Shaare Tefila (NOT this week)
9:30 am Megillah reading & Purim Shpiel
11:30 am Purim Carnival

Wednesday, March 15
7:45 pm “Contemporary Jewish Issues” with Rabbi Layman

Thursday, March 16
1:30 pm JCC Coming of Age Event

Saturday, March 18 - Birthday Shabbat & Enhanced Kiddush
9:00 am Torah study w/Rabbi Layman
10:00 am Family Shabbat Service
10:30 am Tot Shabbat

Sunday, March 19
9:30 am Chavaya and Café Shaare Tefila
10:00 am Sisterhood Book Club - “The Girl You Left Behind”
10:30 am Hebrew Conversation Group

Saturday, March 25
9:00 am Torah study w/Rabbi Layman
Aufruf of Madison Kantzer & Adam Hoffman

Sunday, March 26
9:30 am Chavaya and Café Shaare Tefila
5:00 pm Women’s Seder

FROM THE RABBI’S STUDY
RABBI JONAH LAYMAN

PURIM: FANTASY OR REALITY?

While I was in rabbinical school, I took several required Bible classes. In one we spent considerable time discussing the Book of Esther, the book we read on the holiday of Purim. Some of us may have learned that the Bible in its entirety, from the Torah through the Psalms, represents the word of God. We may have been taught that the content must be accepted as sacred and that the text’s veracity shouldn’t be questioned. Therefore it was surprising for me to learn that common biblical theory suggests that the Book of Esther is to be best understood as a work of comedy or fantasy. As a rabbinical student, it was eye opening and refreshing to learn that such an approach would be Jewishly acceptable, and upon review it makes a lot of sense.

As we know the Book of Esther discusses the Persian Empire of 127 provinces, ruled by King Ahashverosh. The King banishes his wife for refusing to entertain his all male party and institutes a year long beauty pageant to crown a new queen. The Jewish orphan Hadassah/Esther wins. In the meantime the evil Haman draws up a plan to kill all the Jews of the Persian Empire because one Jew, Mordecai, refused to bow down to him. The King approves and generously finances the plan. Mordecai convinces his niece Esther to speak to the King and by so doing save the Jews. King Ahashverosh agrees with Esther and orders Haman to be hanged. He lets the Jews kill as many Persians as they like on the day that the Jews would have been killed and he lets the Jews kill Persians in the capital city of Shushan on the next day as well!

Though some of these details are hard to swallow and it is religiously challenging to read a book with such violent revenge, we can at least understand why the Jewish community needed this book throughout our tortured history. Over the years as we endured persecution, oppression, ghetto life and massacres, we can empathize as to how one day in the year we would need an escape from reality. Purim serves as the opportunity to wear a costume in order to pretend to be someone else and to imagine what it would be like to have things go our way for once. As such, even though the book is fantasy, the reading of the book provides us with an understanding of our history and to be thankful that we live in a country that has afforded us freedom and opportunity.

The Book of Esther could also provide us with motivation to ensure that if we see government policies that could endanger or threaten the safety and security of others then we have to act. As Mordecai says to Esther, “perhaps this is why you achieved such a lofty position.” Our freedom forces us to work on behalf of the freedom of others. May the fantasy of Purim inspire us to work in the real world for justice and equality.

B’vracha
PERSPECTIVE

Of all the many challenges that we encounter, trying to maintain a proper and appropriate perspective is often the most difficult.

For me, it is often too easy to be drawn into a situation such that perspective becomes skewed and whatever the crisis du jour that I am dealing with takes on outsized importance. Sometimes it is work, at others it can be scheduling. Finances are always a good source of warping perspective. It can be fulfilling my responsibilities as president of Shaare Tefila. At present, trying to write this piece, almost a week past deadline with only one day, a half day at that, to go is creating its own mini-crisis. We each have our own particular buttons that we can allow to create stress for us.

It just seems as if there is so much to do and not enough time in which to do it, so many demands on our time. So many bills, but not enough dollars to pay them!

The challenge is to pause, take a step back, take a deep breath, reset and adopt a proper perspective. Much easier said than done. Much. Difficult, but not impossible.

When we come to the place where things start to fall into a proper perspective, what is really and truly of the greatest importance, where we hopefully come to is to examine things larger than we are and see where we and all of our life situations fit in. Where do our jobs, our family, our friends, our community, our rights all fit in? And where can we find the time for God?

It sure seems hard to find the time for God. After all, all the other stuff is right in front of us. It’s loud and on fire and demands our immediate attention. Our jobs, our customers, our kids, our spouses, our bills. They’re all there and not going away! Through it all God is silent. But step back and take that breath. Allow yourself to connect.

How best to connect? Allow me to make a suggestion: come to Shaare Tefila for a service, be it minyan or Shabbat. Use the sanctuary as just that: a safe place to breathe and reflect. A place to hit life’s pause button and connect. A place to get back that all too allusive proper perspective. Whether you follow along with the service or read the commentaries on the side of the pages of the Siddurim, whether you simply observe what is going on inside and outside the sanctuary, find your connection to God and to our synagogue.

Step back and stop thinking of attending services as just another thing to do. Instead, think of it as an opportunity to take some time to unwind from the week. An opportunity to breathe, to connect.

An opportunity to take a good look inward and gain perspective.

The Talmud warns us that we must take care how we use language. Talking about others behind their backs, even if what we are saying is true, is prohibited. The guidelines for shmirat lashon, or guarding what we say, remind us that what we say about others affects them in ways we can never predict.

The rabbis blame the destruction of the Temple, one of the most distressing national traumas in Jewish history, on lashon hara, gossip, and sinat chinam, baseless hatred.

While it is upsetting to think about the fact that we as a people caused such a great upheaval in our own history, the upside is that we have an opportunity to take action against gossip and baseless hatred every day.

Whenever you speak badly about another person, Rabbis say even if it’s true, it has an effect like a rock being dropped into a pool of water: it affects your inner circle, your community, your synagogue, and the Jewish people.

Each of us has the power to choose our words. We should choose positive ones. You have the power to stop engaging in baseless hatred. We should make our circles more positive and welcoming environments.

I think it is a powerful idea that there is such a connection between the words and actions of an individual and their effects on the greater community. When you are at Shaare Tefila, with friends from your Shaare Tefila community, or out in the world, remember the power of shmirat lashon, guarding what you say, and the danger of sinat chinam, baseless hatred. Let’s bring Shaare Tefila’s positive attributes that we cherish - community, connection, faith, friendship, fun, or your own favorite attribute - into the world, and also work together to leave the world a little less negative day by day.

In the Youth and Programming Department, we are taking action and making positive ripples! In February, our teens had a blast making (and munching on) muffins! Except for some taste testing, the muffins we made were dognated to Carroll House, an Interfaith food pantry. Our K-5th group, Machar/Bonim, celebrated Tu B’Shevat with an afternoon of green and tree inspired crafts, learning about recycling and a scavenger hunt!

Looking forward to more Youth and Family events:

On March 5th, all parents of entering K-5th grades are invited to a Ramah Information Session at Café Shaare Tefila. Sharon Safra, the Assistant Director of the Ramah Day Camp of Greater Washington, will be visiting from 11:00 am until noon to give Shaare Tefila all of the details about the local Ramah Day Camp.

On March 12, all congregants are invited to the Megillah reading, Purim Shpiel, and carnival! All of the Purim events are guaranteed to be fun, funny, exciting, and silly, and we want you to be part of it all!

On March 18, Chavaya families and congregants are invited to our second Chavaya Family service of the year. Our students have been preparing and we can’t wait to see what they will sing and show us!
Celebrate Purim with Shaare Tefila!

Megillah Reading and Magician Don Juan on Purim Evening!

Saturday Night, March 11th
Megillah Reading 7:30-9:00 PM

Magician Don Juan performing immediately following

More Purim festivities, Sunday March 12th. See below for details!

SHAARE TEFILA
Purim Carnival
March 12th, 2017

11:30-1:00

Cost is $10 per child, or a max of $20 per family for an “All You Can Play” Admission Bracelet

Play games, buy lunch and hamantachen!

FUN AND PRIZES AT THESE, AND MORE:
• Moonbounce *
• Floating Ducks
• Queen Esther’s Nail Salon
• Decorate A Mask
• Face Painting
• Treasure Hunt
• Lollipop Tree

* FIRST HALF HOUR OF MOONBOUNCE EXCLUSIVELY FOR PRESCHOOLERS!

SHAARE TEFILA
16620 Georgia Ave., Olney
It’s that time of year when the smell of freshly baked hamantaschen is in the air! Yes, it is Purim time followed by my favorite holiday ever, Passover! The Challah Club has begun preparing hamantaschen for the Purim carnival and I believe there will be some to purchase for personal consumption. One of Sisterhood’s biggest events is March 26th, the Women’s Seder celebrating Pesach through song and dance, featuring Sally Heckelman and Lisa Baydush. We really want to see the social hall packed with women celebrating the infusion of the Passover narrative with a woman’s voice and experience. Please contact Lenore Layman for more information.

Scrip
We are looking into new scrip offerings which will earn Shaare Tefila more income. We have a supply of Starbucks gift cards in addition to our usual grocery store offerings. We earned an 11% discount on the Starbucks cards we purchased in December. Judy Beiser has a list of 100s of companies that offer us discounts, some very large, to purchase their cards. Please ask to see her list. With about one week notice she can order gift cards to a variety of stores, for example, CVS, Homegoods, Gap, and Dressbarn.

Kiddushim
We can only provide the wonderful kiddushim because of our volunteer staff. Please click on the link below to see when you are scheduled to volunteer in the kitchen. https://sites.google.com/site/shaarekitchen/home/schedule-for-kitchen-volunteers

Sisterhood Happenings!
March
- 13th Board Meeting
- 26th Women’s Seder

Mark Your Calendars!
Sunday, April 16th at 1 pm – Sisterhood Board Meeting at Fran Weiss’ house. Dairy potluck lunch.

Buy Scrip
Please remember to purchase scrip and don’t forget that we now have Starbucks gift cards!

Our next Enhanced Kiddush will be on March 18 which is also the next Birthday Shabbat. Share your simchas with fellow congregants, send Sara, in the office, your checks and dedications. It is just a minimum of $18 to be included.

Upcoming Dates for Challah & Schmear Grows Up:
April 22
June 17

I’d like to highlight a new family to Shaare Tefila! Please welcome Jackie and Daniel Benn to our shul family! Jackie is Vice President of their HOA and Corresponding Secretary for the Greater Olney Civic Association. Daniel is on the Olney Town Center Advisory Committee. They are both on the board of Relay for Life of Olney. Welcome!

It was great to see so many of you at our musical Shabbat service and dinner on Friday, January 13th. I hope you all enjoyed yourselves! Our next Shabbat dinner will be Friday, March 3rd. I hope you’ll come out to hear me sing with Sally Heckelman, with Stuart Zitomer on drums, and Josh Levin on piano! Register on ChaferWeb or contact Sara in the office.

One of the many things that makes Shaare Tefila so special is our Chavurah program. If you would like to join one of our many Chavurah groups, please email me!

Interested in doing more to help the Shaare Tefila membership process? Consider volunteering on the membership committee. We are looking for volunteers to help in recruitment/outreach, retention, and welcoming new members, delivering new member welcome bags, friendship groups, etc... If interested, please contact me, Stacey Lynch at 301-275-0286 or membership@shaaretefila.org

I look forward to seeing you at shul!

Discover why Ramah Day Camp of Greater Washington, DC is one of the fastest growing Jewish day camps in the area. On Sunday, March 5th, at 11:00 am, join us at Cafe Shaare Tefila to learn about the program, ask questions, and meet Assistant Director Sharon Rosenberg Safra.

Ramah Day Camp is open to current Pre-K through 4th grade students. More information about the camp can also be found at www.ramahdcdaycamp.org.

Our wonderful Mishloach Manot fundraiser is in full swing. The site, HappyPurim.com, is live for your donations. This year’s theme is based on the “Rainbow” - God’s covenant to never again destroy the world with a flood.

Our Purim fundraiser will be colorful, bountiful, and thoughtfully prepared for you by the committee. We are hoping for 100% participation in this important shul fundraiser. The deadline is March 5 so please donate today.
PROGRAMMING

THE HAVDALAH EXPERIENCE

Shaare Tefila Families and friends of all ages enjoyed learning about Israeli music and culture as well as some Israeli dance steps! There were smiles, laughs, food, and lots of fun at our Israeli dance-themed Havdalah Experience.

INSTRUMENTAL SHABBAT SERVICE FOLLOWED BY SHABBAT DINNER
FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 6:00 PM

Menu
Brisket
Beans with tomatoes and veggie sausage
Vegetables
Dessert

Adults: $18 (non member: $22)
Children 5 - 18: $10
(non member: $12)
Max: $54 per member family

Sign up on ChaverWeb by Tuesday, February 28 or contact Sara in the office smiller@shaaretefila.org.

SHAARE TEFILA’S MONTHLY SHABBAT DINNER PROGRAM
JOIN FELLOW MEMBERS IN CELEBRATING SHABBAT AT FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER AND SHABBAT SERVICES
The evening starts at 6:00 pm

Friday, March 3: Instrumental Shabbat
Friday, May 12: Yom Haatzmaut Celebration
Friday, June 9: End of Year Bar-B-Q/Board Installation

ROSH CHODESH WOMEN’S CIRCLE
LED BY SUSAN RUBENSTEIN RUBECARL@VERIZON.NET
All women are welcome to join during the Torah reading time when we meet in the Futrovsky Family Library.

Rosh Chodesh Nissan
Saturday, April 1
Rosh Chodesh Iyar
Saturday, May 27

GAN KATAN PLAYGROUP
MARA LANSKY
The Gan Kataners had a fun day discussing and showing Chesed.
We made "helping hands" with water beads. It takes more than one person to make it, so we had to help! We also had tons of fun singing, reading and playing in centers.

THE HAVDALAH EXPERIENCE
Shaare Tefila Sisterhood proudly presents

A Musical Women’s Seder

Celebrating Pesach through Song and Dance
Sunday, March 26 at 5:30 PM
At Shaare Tefila
Featuring Sally Heckelman and Lisa Baydush

$28 per adult/$10 per child (ages 16 and under)
Register by Sunday, March 19
Contact Lenore Layman (layman@cesds.org) for more information and registration form

THE MEN’S CLUB 2017 PASSOVER WINE SALE
MILT GOLDSAMT AND STEVE LEAVEY

The Men’s Club 2017 Passover Wine Sale is Beginning! Order by email, phone or regular mail beginning March 12-April 9. Pickup and/or home delivery begins March 12. Choose from a wide range of Kosher for Passover wines, ready to enhance your Passover holiday and seder!

Shaare Tefila Men’s Club
16620 Georgia Ave. Olney, MD 20832

2017 Passover Wine Sale
[All wines Kosher for Passover]

Please order by email, phone or regular mail beginning MARCH 12-APRIL 9
Pickup and/or home delivery beginning MARCH 12

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<td>Teul Lake Moscato $14</td>
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<td>Tishbi Estate Winery Viognier (semi)</td>
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<td>Carmel Appellation Sauvignon Blanc</td>
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| MORAD FRUIT WINES                   |          |                                    |          |
|-------------------------------------|----------|                                    |          |
| Passion Fruit——Lychee——Pomegranate—Grapefruit $24 |          |                                    |          |

Email: saleavey@gmail.com, or call 301-358-4928 or 301-325-4859 or mail to Stephen Leavey, 13704 Castle Cliff Way, Silver Spring, MD 20904

WINE SALE ORDER FORM

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Please make checks payable to Shaare Tefila Men’s Club
ART IN THE WINER FAMILY GALLERY

Urban Color

The Winer Family Gallery presents the work of photographers Susan M. Stregack and Rollin S. Fraser, known together as Streams of Light Photography. Their exhibit is called "Urban Color." According to Stregack and Fraser, "When the colors of light combine, a strong white light will emerge. Yet that light cannot exist without these component parts. We have chosen to isolate these parts, sometimes as very small pieces of the whole, as they are found in an urban setting."

The two met in the darkroom at Montgomery College and have been married for more than 16 years. They are both affiliated with the Maryland Professional Photographers Association and the Professional Photographers of America. Their work, separately and together, has been shown at many local venues including Brookside Nature Center, Glenview Mansion and Montgomery College. Working with other local photographers, they were part of the Farm Project to document the disappearing farms of Montgomery County. They also were honored to have been two of the photographers for "Portraits of Life," an exhibit of the words and images of local Holocaust survivors.

This show, "Urban Color" was on display at the Montpelier Arts Center in Laurel, MD, before coming to Shaare Tefila. All work is for sale and a portion of the proceeds benefits Shaare Tefila.

“Enough” Photograph, Susan M. Stregack

“Ithaca” Photograph, Rollin S. Fraser

THOUGHT OF THE MONTH

Rabbi Layman
משנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה

When Adar Begins Happiness Increases

The Rabbis centuries ago felt it necessary to remind us that the calendar should signal our emotions. Adar is the month immediately preceding Nissan - the month of Passover - and as such we can begin thinking about observing and celebrating that joyous holiday of freedom. Just look in the supermarket and see the Passover food already on sale! Perhaps the rabbis were also considering the holiday of Purim which falls in the middle of the month when we celebrate the events described in the Book of Esther, dress in costume, and share gifts with our friends and neighbors. Or perhaps the rabbis were recognizing that the winter rains in Israel are coming to an end and signs of Spring are appearing. The trees are starting to bloom and flowers are poking their heads from the ground. No matter the reason, the rabbis hope that we catch the spirit, leave the winter blues behind, and get into the spirit of the season and the mood of the holidays.

HELP WANTED

Seeking Website Help!

Looking for a webmaster to maintain the Shaare Tefila website.
For more information contact Stacey Lynch at membership@shaaretfila.org

FM Wireless Hearing System

Shaare Tefila has installed a wireless listening system designed for the hearing impaired. The units are on a table located on the left side of the sanctuary by the main door. There are two types of units. Instructions on the proper use of the devices are also on the table. Select the type you require and enjoy a more meaningful spiritual experience.

LOOKING TO JOIN SHAARE TEFILA?

Contact:
Stacey Lynch, Membership VP
membership@shaaretfila.org

Jill Goldwater, Executive Director
jgoldwater@shaaretfila.org
301-593-3410 X101

MEN’S CLUB

Save the Date

May 21: Blue Yarmulke Man of the Year Dinner at Har Shalom.
For more information contact Mike Binder mjbinder@comcast.net
At Gates of Discovery: The Rose and George Teller Pre-school of Shaare Tefila, we constantly look to our values and evaluate how we can live more authentically by them. One of our values is making the children’s learning visible to themselves and to others.

One way to accomplish this is through “The Hundred Languages of Children.” This phrase is a metaphorical phrase that comes from a poem by Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the schools in Reggio Emilia. This theory says that although adults tend to rely on verbal language to communicate, people actually crave different ways to express themselves. Some other languages include paint, dance, music, light and shadow, and many more. Just as with English, to express yourself well in any of these languages, you need to develop fluency. Each language has its own vocabulary, grammar, and syntax.

To help the children and staff develop fluency, we have an atelierista on staff. The atelierista is a woman with both an early childhood background as well as an art background. And for the first time this year, she created an atelier, or studio space, that is dedicated to exploring the hundred languages. Each grade level in the school visits the atelier each week and is focusing on a different language.

This year’s four-year olds are focusing on drawing. Drawing is a visual language, and like any other language it is learned through use. By the age of five, most children have developed a repertoire of graphic equivalents or symbols for the elements of their environment, such as a house, a tree, or a person. These graphics are highly individualized since they result from children’s conceptual understanding rather than observation of the world around them. For example, each child’s symbol for a flower will be different from any other child’s.

Once a child has established a definite graphic (or schema) for a flower, it will be repeated again and again without much variation unless a particular experience causes the child to modify his/her schema.

In the atelier, we provide those experiences and challenge the children’s schemas. We work on learning how to really “see” the flower, that is, see beyond the simple material facts of looking and really observe and understand the flower, its reality, and its context. When the children confront their assumptions in the atelier, they open their minds to new ideas in other areas as well.

There is a long and proud tradition in the religious school of the students reading the Megillah on Purim in front of the entire congregation. Over the years, many parents have asked about the practicality of teaching students verses which are read once a year, instead of focusing on Hebrew prayer which is recited weekly at Shabbat services. Parents have commented that many of our third graders don’t yet recognize all the Hebrew letters by Purim. Wouldn’t time be better spent by continuing with the Hebrew language curriculum?

Reading in Hebrew and chanting the text of the Book of Esther in front of the entire congregation is scary. There’s no way to sugar coat the reality that this is a formidable challenge we ask of our students. However, the confidence gained by facing the fear of reading in Hebrew remains with our students. Each year, students are encouraged to increase their knowledge and proficiency as they learn to recite more verses. Though we devote a significant part of the year to learning the Megillah verses, it is an investment in our students’ Jewish future. They are not only learning the text and its meaning, but they are standing up in front of our Jewish community and taking a leadership role from the tender age of seven or eight. They are becoming competent contributors to our congregation.

We are very proud of our students that have taken time to learn their verses and look forward to their reading from the Megillah on the day of Purim. Please join us all on March 11 and 12 in our celebration of this fun and meaningful holiday.
PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

TOT SHABBAT
WHO: Young Children & Families
WHAT: Morning Shabbat Program
WHEN: Shabbat, 10:30 AM - 11:15 AM
March 18
April 22
June 3

GAN KATAN PLAYGROUP
WHO: Children preschool age and their parents
WHAT: A fun & engaging program includes play, story time, crafts and snack - Free
WHEN: From September through May generally on the second Sunday of the month.

Next meeting is Sunday, March 5, 10:00 am
RSVP to Cilla Grosberg at drgmrs@aol.com

FAMILY SHABBAT SERVICE
AN ALTERNATIVE LIVELY SHABBAT SERVICE ESPECIALLY FOR FAMILIES. CO-LED BY THE KIDS. EVERYONE IS WELCOME - PEOPLE WITH OR WITHOUT CHILDREN WILL ENJOY THIS SERVICE.

10:00 AM IN THE SANCTUARY
March 18 - April 22 - June 3
Questions? Contact Missy Mandell mmandell@shaaretelfila.org

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

SAVE THE DATE

March
Saturday night, March 11 - Purim Megillah Reading
Sunday, March 12 - Megillah Reading, Purim Shpiel, Purim Carnival

Sunday, March 26, 5:30 pm - A Musical Women’s Seder
Celebrating Pesach through song and dance. Featuring Sally Heckelman & Lisa Baydush

May
Fourth Annual JTS Evening of Learning, ”Relating to the Other in Jewish Texts and with Jewish Values”
When: Sunday, May 7, 5:00 pm
Where: Congregation Beth El

NEED ASSISTANCE?
IF A FAMILY MEMBER OR ANOTHER CONGREGANT IS HOSPITALIZED OR NEEDS HELP FROM THE SHAARE TEFLA COMMUNITY, PLEASE NOTIFY THE OFFICE OR RABBI LAYMAN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Contact the office or Rabbi Layman (301) 593-3410

DONATIONS OF BOOKS FOR USE AT SERVICES
Please consider donating a book in memory of or in honor of a loved one or in recognition of a special life event. Contact Sara in the office.

Siddur $54
Machzor $36
Large Type Machzor $54
I would like to use this month’s column to talk about…us. Our community, our synagogue, and our interactions need some publicity.

A number of significant and heartwarming events, projects and programs have happened, are happening, and will happen and these have given me a deeper sense of community.

1st Beautification of our synagogue grounds. This project, started, and led by Lanny Plotkin, was at no cost to our operations, and involved many volunteers who willingly gave of their time. I refer of course to the planting of small trees around the grounds and the care and watering of them until they “root” and bloom this spring. Kudos go to Lanny and his team of volunteers.

2nd A very special Shabbat. We had several high school graduating seniors participating and it was wonderful to watch their young determined faces and listen to their participation in the special Shabbat service held in their honor. Everyone shared some extremely warm moments. Some of the students had been through our religious school from the beginning, some joined more recently, some were students at Charles E. Smith JDS, but they all fit together like hands and gloves.

3rd Preparations for this year’s Purim shpiel. A (surprisingly large) group of us including some talented, and some not so talented (I mean me, of course) meet Sundays with our Purim Shpiel mentors, the capable Stacey Lynch and her co-chair, Shelley Rochester, of fame on the local stage, to rehearse for the upcoming Purim celebrations March 12th. We laugh, joke and practice to improve our performance to the point where after just two rehearsals we don’t sound that bad. I think that by the week after the Purim holiday, we will be terrific.

4th Comedy Night!!! What more need be said. The room was full, the walls of the social hall were shaking with laughter, everyone present was glad to be there. And we had great fun again, thanks to Jeff Hysen and our home team headed by Cilla Grosberg.

5th Learning I want to shout out (or give it up -I learned that at Comedy Night) for our very own moresh, Jonah Layman. He teaches two classes, one Friday am and one Sunday am that I am fortunate enough to attend. On Fridays, (which I only occasionally attend) we study the Torah text in English, searching for meaning and understanding of each word and phrase. The discussions are deep and far ranging, and the questions asked are often profound. On Sundays, (which I attend rather more often) we study Talmud using wonderful English references that make the teachings of the rabbis easier for us to understand. Our discussions here are lively also and often diverge into speculations of what life was like back then millennia ago when the oral arguments were being formed and subsequently codified into what exists today. This class provides insights into who we are today and why we develop as we have, based on our increased understanding of our origins.

I wrote this column to emphasize two concepts, community and diversity. In each of these circumstances, many congregants came together to pursue a common goal and the ruach was terrific. Indeed, one size does not fit all. I mentioned a variety of topics from gardening (trees) to performing (shpiel) to laughter (Comedy Night) to learning (classes). That just scratches the surface. You too can participate and get more ‘bang for your buck’ at Shaare Tefila; just say “I will” and “I can” when you see a flyer, or hear an announcement of something that tickles your fancy.
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