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From the Bimah: Our Rabbi's Message

Dennis Jones, Student Rabbi



Food for Thought from Torah Portion Shoftim

I have long considered it somewhat ironic that almost all of Christianity and a very large segment of traditional Judaism have put their hope in the coming of a Messiah, an anointed king of David's line, when a plain reading of the Hebrew Bible suggests to me that God *never wanted a king* for the people of Israel at all. If this statement surprises you, then read on! My explanation begins in the next Torah portion that we will consider at Temple Beth Shalom, Shoftim—Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9. Shoftim is the Hebrew word for “judges,” the first word of this Torah portion. Shoftim is the 48th weekly Torah

portion in the annual cycle; it is the fifth reading in the book of Deuteronomy. In general, the portion deals with an ideal balance between three “branches” of the government of the emerging Israelite nation—priest, king, and prophet. Interesting that the founders of the United States also composed the Constitution balancing *three* branches of government, but that is a topic for another day.

Getting back to my claim that Adonai never wanted a monarchy for Israel to begin with. The first thing one notices when one reads the book of Deuteronomy is that with respect to just about every law, the Israelites are commanded *not* to do as the nations around them have done. But, when it comes to the command concerning kings, we read, “When you enter the land which Adonai your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, you will say, ‘I will set a king over me *like all the nations around me.*’ You shall surely set a king over you....” (Deut. 17:14-15) The fact that the establishing of a king was the only way in which the Torah allowed the Israelites to be like the nations around them did not escape the notice of the sages of our people over the centuries. Commentary on this portion has been ample and varied. While Maimonides considered the appointment of a king to be an obligation, Ibn Ezra asserted that it was an allowance. Abarbanel claimed it to be concession by the Almighty, and Rabbenu Bachya went as far as to say that it was a punishment. (See, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Shoftim—Learning and Leadership,” www.aish.com)

One cannot help but notice that the commands regarding kings are predominately prohibitions. The king was not to “multiply horses for himself,” nor “multiply wives for himself,” nor “greatly increase silver and gold for himself.” Many of our sages have pointed out that two of Israel’s greatest kings, David and Solomon, broke all three of these commands. (See, *Talmud Sanhedrin* 21b)

Torah portion Shoftim refers us ahead to a time when the children of Israel would come into the land which God had promised to the patriarchs and matriarchs. The actual occurrence of this eventuality is recorded in the book of I Samuel. The Israelites had indeed conquered and occupied the land promised to them under the leadership of Joshua and successive judges. Samuel was serving as prophet and judge in Israel at the time. Samuel has been considered by many Jewish sages to be a prophet second only to Moses in wisdom and spirit. Late in Samuel’s life, the elders of Israel approached him saying, “Behold you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” (I Sam. 8:5) Samuel was grieved by the request, and Scripture tells us that he turned to Adonai in prayer. Adonai’s answer to Samuel is instructive. “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all they say to you for they have not rejected you, but **they have rejected me from being king over them.**” (v. 7) And, as if that were not bad enough, Adonai goes on to compare the Israelite’s request for a king with the many rebellious things they had done during their forty year sojourn in the wilderness.

While Samuel is told by Adonai to grant the people’s request for a king, he is instructed by God to give the people the following “solemn warning:”

This will be the custom of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen.... And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. And he will take a tenth of

your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use them for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but **Adonai will not answer you in that day**. (I Sam. 8:11-18)

Pretty bleak! In fact, quite scary! What is even scarier is that according to the biblical history recorded in the rest of I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles, all of these dire warnings were, in fact, realized. The transgressions of Israel's kings led first to the splitting of the nation into northern and southern kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This was followed by several destructions and captivities. Northern Israel was destroyed and taken captive by Assyria, and Judah, in the south, was destroyed and taken captive by Babylonia.

It was in the midst of these destructions and exiles that the great prophets of Israel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others began to get glimpses of a future time which would be very different than what the nation was currently experiencing. They foresaw a time of peace and prosperity, a time when war and famine would be no more. And, while there are references in the Hebrew Prophets to a messianic King of the line of David, those references are *very* few in number. What has tended to happen, primarily by Christian commentators and to a lesser extent by Jewish commentators, is that every future good deed mentioned anywhere in the Prophets has been *superimposed* on the idea of a messianic king. Now, fortunately, Reform Judaism, has progressed beyond this interpretation, and does attribute most of the good things promised in the Hebrew Prophets to the actions of righteous men and women of all nations.

I have often wondered if some of the great things spoken of in the prophetic books might not be facilitated by another leader who is introduced in Torah portion Shoftim. This figure has been referred to by many sages as a “prophet like Moses.” In Shoftim, the fledgling Israelite nation is told that they did not need to resort to witchcraft, divining, or fortune-telling. Adonai promises, “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you [Moses], and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” (Deut. 18:18) Just a disclaimer here, that while the ancient text uses the masculine pronoun, my interpretation would be more egalitarian. I would assert that the point of this promise is that there would always be a *Divine connection*—prophesy among the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. We read often in our ancient, sacred writings about such a connection *historically*. Where is that clear direction from the Almighty today? Is it something that we should be hoping for, perhaps even praying for?

This is why I find the study of Torah and the Prophets so exciting. Not only do they detail amazing interactions between the Creator and humankind in the past, but I believe they contain the seeds of profound changes that are possible in the future. But, the task is ours to study, interpret, and apply these ancient holy writings of our rich Jewish tradition to the difficulties we face in the modern age. Won't you join me for services at Temple Beth Shalom as we make an effort to do just that? *Ken yehi ratzon*—May this be God's will!

The President's Message

Marsue Davidson, TBS President

Wow, what an amazing beginning of our new year at Temple Beth Shalom. Our first weekend together was so emotional and spiritual. Seeing all of you and sharing Alec's Bar Mitzvah with you and my family was one of the most wonderful events in our lives. Thank you to all who attended, and to Rabbi Dennis for leading us through this meaningful and life changing event. Learning as a family is so important, and we are so grateful for everyone's help. Our family was touched by all of you. We especially appreciated the Rabbi's thoughtful inclusion of an English explanation of the service. We felt the spiritual connection and understanding of the meaning of this mitzvah.

Temple Beth Shalom has a new kitchen that is just beautiful. Thank you to Lin, Barbara and Tiffany and all the members of the Sisterhood for all their hard work and generosity. The kitchen is completed and has new appliances, countertops and an island. The pass-through has been closed to enable additional cabinets. Our double stoves are beautiful and will come in handy for all weekend service meal preparation and especially our latkes at Hanukah. Please come in and see our new space and celebrate monthly with Rabbi Dennis and our congregation. We are so lucky to have Rabbi Dennis as our spiritual leader and thank him so much for all his continued education and dedication to Temple Beth Shalom.

This year we have been blessed with another generous donation and the board members of Temple Beth Shalom would like to thank David Cohen's family for his generous posthumous gift and we will be forever thankful for his support of our faith, our community and our temple. Were it not for Mr. Cohen and other TBS founders, TBS would not be here in Hickory, North Carolina and we all thank Mr Cohen's family from the bottom of our hearts for his recent bequest. Temple Beth Shalom is blessed to have had a founder like David Cohen and we will not forget what he created and continues to provide for TBS's future.

Besides the new kitchen, we have installed a new upstairs air conditioner, and serviced the downstairs unit. We are planning many more improvements over this next year and would like your feedback on areas that might need attention, or additional education services or classes you would like to see at Temple Beth Shalom. Join us on September 25th for our annual TBS clean-up day. The children, board, and temple members will be at the temple all day preparing for the High holidays and sharing the responsibility of cleaning our sanctuary for our new year. Lunch will be provided and we would love to see everyone come together to do what they can.

APPRECIATION

Our temple has been blessed with two very generous former members who epitomized "Pray as if everything depended on God. Act as if everything depended on you," (Mishkan T'Filah, page 243); Howard Zerden, who died in December of 2005, and David Cohen, who died in April 2014. They used to take long walks together, were born in Hickory, went to school in Hickory, worked in retail establishments, were bachelors, and were in families that each had 6 children and had retail stores very near one another. Howard left a bequest to the temple that established the Howard Zerden Foundation that funds our temple rabbi. David's estate recently bequeathed monies that have initially been used to replace the air conditioning and supplement sisterhood funds to renovate the kitchen. A Finance Committee, established by the Board of Trustees, will determine how best to invest this latest bequest. David was a gentle man who regularly attended services and his legacy to the temple will be wisely used to honor him.

We also appreciate generous donations from:

David Peltzer to the kitchen renovation in honor of Aaron Tosky and his healing hands.

Dr. and Mrs Charles Reed in honor of Dr. Aaron Tosky.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TBS Sunday School Program

Marsue Davidson, Director Sunday School



TBS Sunday School had its first session and it was great! We had a wonderful turnout of children and parents. We began with meeting everyone and setting expectations. We then reviewed the calendar and asked the children and parents what they wanted to get out of this session. We got a lot of great feedback and understanding and we are so proud of their commitment to this next year. We are so lucky to have Rabbi Dennis Jones, his wife Kathy and daughters, Heidi and Jamie to lead our children during this next 2016-2017 term. We have a lot

of events and projects scheduled and are looking forward to the children participating in our services. The Sunday School will help during the annual clean-up day, so please reach out and make the children feel welcome, encourage them, and keep an eye out. It is important for them to take pride and ownership of our place of worship. We look forward to making TBS a beautiful place.

This next year, our Sunday School sessions will be filled with exciting new activities, field trips and community outreach projects. We will continue to host our annual Hanukah Party, Purim celebration and have increased participation in the monthly services. All children of TBS Sunday School have agreed to sign a contract declaring their commitment to their Jewish learning. Attached is the schedule of services, Sunday School sessions and special events. Please mark your calendars and participate in the services and Sunday School sessions. Our young Jewish children are the future of this community and we encourage you and your families to participate.

TBS Sisterhood

Lin Gentry, Sisterhood President

Sisterhood has been very busy this summer! The kitchen renovation is done, and we'd like to thank all those who donated their time and money toward it. We are so appreciative. There were quite a few days and nights of meetings and moving dishes and cleaning, so much cleaning! We're looking forward to using it for rabbi weekends, baking hamentaschen, holidays, and temple special events.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday Sept. 6th at 6:30pm at Backstreet's, between the Lowe's hardware and Lowe's grocery stores. Please let Lin know if you're coming before the 6th so she can tell the restaurant.



Harriet Sederholm Scholarship Fund



The Harriet Sederholm Scholarship Fund was established by a long-standing Temple member, Burt Sederholm, to honor his wife Harriet, who died shortly after her retirement after 25 years with the Catawba County Department of Social Services. Mr. Sederholm's efforts provided the initial funding from generous family members and friends and it has been added to over the years. The

scholarship is available to students. Temple members are looked upon favorably, but one does not need to be a temple member nor Jewish to apply. The scholarship fund dividends are used to provide scholarship awards. Candidates may submit an essay to any one of the committee members. The essay will explain who the candidate is, what they are doing currently, what their plans are for the future,

TBS Member Business Directory

Dr. Ron DuBow
 Internist, Geriatric Specialist
 (elderly care) Pediatrician
 2651 Morganton Blvd SW
 Lenoir, NC 28645
 828-757-8950

Dr. Laura Faruque of
 A Womans View
 915 Tate Blvd SE
 Suite170
 Hickory, NC 28602
 828-345-0800

Dr. Mark Faruque of
 Bethlehem Family Practice
 174 Bolick Lane Suite 202
 Taylorsville NC 28681
 828-495-8226

Marsue Davidson, RN DCS
 Unifour Nursing
 805 W. 25th Street
 Newton, NC 28681
 828-464-0244
 www.unifournursing.net

Robyn Diamond, Certified Health and Wellness Coach, Specializing in Digestive Health and Stress Management
 843-991-6338
 Robyn@HealthHappyYou.com
 www. HealthHappyYou.com

how the scholarship funds will be used and, if applicable, what the connection may be to Jewish life.

Interested students should submit their essay by April 30th. The scholarship season runs from May 1-April 30. All applicants will be notified in writing if their application has been approved or declined by May 15th. Awards should be mailed to recipients by May 31st.

The essay should be emailed to any of the committee members: Lin Gentry, Julie Owens or Sandy Guttler.

Naturally, the committee encourages everyone to make a tax-deductible donation to the Scholarship Fund at any time.

Temple Board

Our next board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 7th at 7pm. Board meetings are open to all temple members. Please join us and become a part of our TBS family.



TBS Board members are:

Student Rabbi:

Dennis Jones

Officers:

- Marsue Davidson, President
- Gavriela Crater, Vice-President
- Mark Faruque, Treasurer
- Tiffany Hull, Secretary
- Barbara Laufer, Past President

Members at Large:

- Liz Correll
- Marion DuBow
- Debra Engelmann
- Lin Gentry
- Sandy Guttler
- Pam Jones
- Susan Rider
- Aaron Tosky
- Karen Ferguson
 (Bulletin editor)

The TBS Board extends a warm welcome to our newest temple member, Carolyn Boro and grandson Gage Boro.

Member Business Directory (cont'd)

Professor Gitlin Hebrew Lessons
109 6th Ave NE
Hickory, NC 28601
828-328-9443

**Alice Guy of
The Hickory Wine Shoppe**
238 Union Square NW
Hickory, NC 28601
828-334-4441
Info@HickoryWine.com

Michelle Oxenberg Jordon
Managing Director of Design
3166 Main Ave. S.E.
Hickory, North Carolina 28602
828.322.3480 Ext. 271
michelle@robertabbey.com

Marc Fedder M.D., F.A.C.P.
Frye Care Internal Medicine of
Hickory
915 Tate Blvd Suite 186
Hickory, N.C., 28602
828-303-2131

**Temple Beth Shalom Life Cycle
September Events**

Birthdays

Eliana Richards 9/3
Ken Bonfield 9/4
Karina Vishnya 9/5
Nadine Igdal 9/17
Joseph Garrick 9/17
Keegan Blankenship 9/19
Aurora Cohn 9/20
Tyler Faruque 9/22
Chris Weatherly 9/25
Freddie Sokol 9/29

Anniversaries

Michael and Katie Schoenberg 9/4

Yahrzeit

Marvin Zerden 9/3



Schedule for Rabbi Services and Sunday School 2016-2017

<u>Date</u>		<u>Comments</u>	<u>Bulletin Deadline</u>
August	12-14	Services/Alec Davidson Bar Mitzvah	July 30
	28	Sunday School/Kickoff Meeting	
September	9-11	Services/Sunday School	August 27
	25	Sunday School	
October	2	Rosh Hashana 7:30 PM (Sunday)	September 17
	3	Rosh Hashana 10:00 AM (Monday)	
	11	Yom Kippur/Kol Nidre 7:30 PM (Tuesday)	
	12	Yom Kippur 10:00 AM and 5:00 PM Neilah/Breakfast (Wed.)	
	16	Sunday School/Sukkah Building/Sukkot Blessings/Lulav-Etrog/Luncheon?	
	24	Simchat Torah 7:00 PM (Monday night-- <i>in lieu of Sunday School 10/23</i>)	
	November	6	
November	18-20	Services/Sunday School	November 5
	December	9-11	
December	25	Sunday School? (First day of Hanukah!!)	November 26
	January	6-8	
January	22	Sunday School	December 24
	February	3-5	
February	19	Sunday School	January 21
	March	10-12	
March	26	Sunday School	February 25
	April	7-9	
April	11	6:00 PM Passover Community Seder (Tuesday)	March 25
	23	Sunday School	
	May	5-7	
May	21	Sunday School	April 22
	30	Erev Shavuot Service 7:30 PM (Tuesday)	
	June	2-4	
June			May 20