

From the Cantor-Educator



Frequently, newsletter articles like this can take an academic tone, elucidating some minor point over which nearly nobody ever scratched their head and are thus dismissed. It is all the more so when certain holidays approach and a Cantor themes an article around an obscure liturgical melody or piece of Jewish musical

history. I'm as interested as most of my colleagues in educating you thusly, yet the dearth of Jewish holidays in January and February may have spared you. Instead, I'll use this space to update you on a few developments.

Tefilah in Religious School

Nearly every Sunday, students already engaged in Hebrew learning (4th - 7th grades) come together for 30 minutes in our sanctuary. This time is used for *Tefilah*, Hebrew for prayer, and in it, we model an abbreviated weekday morning service. At its simplest, *Tefilah* provides rote repetition of prayers and words taught throughout our curriculum, but there the subtle benefits are multitude. *Tefilah* time provides a framework for exploring communal prayer and individual spirituality, topics not easily taught in a classroom. It also affords an opportunity to dive into broader themes of specific prayers and the overall shape of a service. We can experiment with different modes of learning, new melodies and even movement to convey new feelings and meaning. All together and over time, these provide students with a more intimate understanding of how services are structured, so they are more familiar wherever they may be encountered- at TBS or elsewhere. One final benefit is creating among our students a social community of Jewish practice. This peer-driven experience draws lessons from the Jewish camping movement and is something I know many parents value at TBS. If you're curious and find yourself at TBS at 10:15am, feel free to join us!

Students Issued Spiritual Passports

Students between 4th and 7th grade are expected to attend and participate in a number of Friday and Saturday morning Shabbat services annually. The overarching goals are to familiarize our students with our services, contextualize prayer lessons from class, and foster a sense of belonging to our congregational community in advance of becoming *B'nai Mitzvah*. Of course, tell that to a 4th grader and prepare yourself for a blank stare!

To make this requirement more fun and adventurous, we've issued "Spiritual Passports" to each student to help them document their Jewish journey over the next few years. Mimicking a real passport from the State of Israel, students can present theirs to the Rabbi or myself at the conclusion of each service, whereupon he or I will "stamp" it to indicate they have participated and made another step in their spiritual travels. It is colorful, fun, and by the end of 4 years, students can look back in amazement at how far they've come.

Already, students are in the habit of approaching the Bima following services to get their Passports stamped. The first time we invited students to do so was during a family service with 6th grade and *Makhela* participating. Rabbi Goldstein and I were overwhelmed by the response. The crush of students asking to get their stamps that night felt very similar to what one actually experiences in a customs line. In recognition of the Passports' popularity and to add to the fun, Rabbi Goldstein ordered special custom self-inking stamps to use and speed up the process. While the Passports were intended for just 4th - 7th Grades, many younger students have asked for theirs to get stamped as well, and so we are revving up the printing presses once more so that ALL students can participate.

Nashira - Adult Choir

Nashira has experienced an added jolt of energy, welcoming several new voices into the choir. It's a testament to our *Makhela* youth choir and its director, Greg Weinman, that one new voice is a graduate of *Makhela*. I hope there will be many more in the coming years. Several additional adults have also joined *Nashira*, growing our ranks significantly. Participation in *Nashira* is open to all adults. If you find yourself humming along to music, whether in the shower, the car or just walking through your day, we'd love for you to sing with us. If your voice is great- it will make the rest of our voices stronger. And if you think your voice is not great or strong enough, to you I say, we'd love for you to sing with us. Our voices will make yours stronger. Our voices are stronger together!

There is so much more to report but alas, it will need to wait until our next newsletter, by which time the celebration of *Purim* and *Pesach* will assuredly have subsumed my article! Until then, I'll see you in *Shul* and school!