

# TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

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## From the Bimah: Our Rabbi's Message

Rabbi Dennis Jones

### *Can Abraham Offer Insight on Healing America's Wounds?*

Happy civil New Year, everyone!! I enter 2022 with a great deal of optimism, tempered, of course, by deep concern for several serious issues. Like many of you, I had hoped and prayed that the world would have been well over the Covid-19 pandemic by now. Yet, here we are in the midst of the surge of a new variant, Omicron. I am pleased with the progress our country is making in the area of race relations. We are not where we need to be yet, but I have warned before that our current situation is the result of centuries of wrongdoing and inequity. I believe it will take years of vision and hard work to achieve the level of equality under the law that is aspired to in America's founding documents. So, we must struggle on toward that goal. My other deep concern as we enter 2022 is the level of polarization and animosity that has emerged between conservatives and progressives in our political system. We have certainly been more polarized at times in America's history, but this is certainly the worst it has been in my lifetime.

One of the ways that I have chosen to attack elements of each of these concerns is through the avenue of interfaith understanding and dialogue. We as human beings have much more that unites us than that divides us. Through dialogue we can focus on our common needs and goals and put divisive issues into perspective. As we enter 2022, I am approaching the end of my 5<sup>th</sup> year as president of the

Catawba Valley Interfaith Council. You know I say often from the bima, what an honor it is to be the spiritual leader of the local Jewish community. Only adding to that honor is the fact that my interfaith colleagues have chosen the Jewish representative to the Council Board to be president for five years running.

Particularly since the brutal murders at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina in June 2015, I have been single-mindedly committed to build bridges across any lines that divide humankind—religious, racial, ethnic, national, political, etc. I have speculated before that the common respect among western religions for the patriarch, Abraham, might be a starting place for dialogue. If you have not read it yet, I heartily recommend Bruce Feiler’s book, *Abraham-A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2002).

Most of you know by now that I firmly believe in the words of the Hebrew Prophets when they say, “Then they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore. In that day every person will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, with none to make them afraid” (Isa. 2:4; Micah 4:3-4). As we pray in the modern Jewish liturgy, “I am a Jew because Israel places humanity and its unity above the nations and above Israel itself” (*Mishkan T’filah*, CCAR 2007, p. 203). I do believe that a time will come, as we pray in the *Aleinu*, “O may all, created your image, become one in spirit and one in friendship....” (*Mishkan*, p. 289). In his book entitled *Abraham*, Feiler explores the possibility that it may just be this one biblical figure, so central to each of the three major Western faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, that has the historical credibility and depth to bring these faiths together.

Feiler starts off his book with a brief overview of the life of Abraham, summarized from Biblical sources. He delves into the view of Abraham from the perspective of each major religion. Now Feiler is not a theologian, so his assessment of each religion’s development of Abraham is brutally honest. I know that I, as a progressive Jewish rabbi, enjoyed reading Feiler’s assessment of Judaism’s view of Abraham, blemishes and all. One of the topics Feiler treated most bluntly is a topic that I have remarked on many times myself. That is how the rabbis of the late second Temple period, once they realized that Rome was about to destroy the nation and the Temple, began to re-interpret Scripture in such a way as to convey the *individual importance* of keeping Torah. In their effort to reinforce the antiquity of the moral code they were promoting, the rabbis of this period gave novel interpretations to ancient passages that sometimes undermined the validity of the plain meaning of the text. In addition to that, those same rabbis’ own commentaries were regarded more and more highly to the point their weight may have begun to equal or even exceed the weight of the Torah as written. This concept has become widely known as the “Oral Torah.” Now, as a progressive Jew, that idea is not offensive to me. I understand that the ancient writings must be constantly reinterpreted in the light of changing societal needs and new historical and scientific

discoveries. I believe that the Torah, similar to the United States Constitution, is true enough and sound enough to endure that modernization without weakening its validity or authority.

I must share, however, that one of my very good friends, who is an evangelical Christian pastor, shared with me that he took great offense at the way Feiler handled Scripture and tradition in his book, *Abraham*. Feiler argues that once the Jewish rabbis opened the door to scriptural reinterpretation and the elevation of commentary to a level of scriptural authority, the Christian writers and commentators used this same approach to advocate their own interpretations of the Scripture and to establish their own traditions. They, of course, were followed soon by Muslim interpreters. It is true, I suppose, as Feiler notes in his discussion, that most religions would not want to admit that their views have evolved over time or in reaction to external forces (*Abraham*, p. 131).

Following the brief overview of each religion's view of Abraham, which, as noted, explained each faith's methods of historical and scriptural understanding, Feiler begins a brief study of the history of interfaith activities. The Parliament of the World's Religions is widely regarded as the beginning of the interfaith movement. It was the idea of Charles Bonney, who proposed inviting representatives from each of the world's major religions to a convocation to be held at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. This was followed quickly by several major world interfaith organizations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the World Missionary Conference (1910), the World Congress of Faiths (1933), and the World Council of Churches (1948). Feiler points out that by the "start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the idea that one religion was going to extinguish the others was deadlier than it had been in two thousand years.... A new type of religious interaction was needed, involving not just swords, plowshares, and the idea of triumph, but conversation, interaction, and the idea of pluralism" (*Abraham*, p. 195).

Feiler contends, quoting Walter Brueggeman, the well-known theologian from Georgia's Columbia Theological Seminary, that it is "perfectly legitimate" for Christians, Jews, and Muslims to draw their own meaning from history and tradition. "It is not legitimate for Christians or anyone else to presume that theirs is the only direction" (*Abraham*, p. 201). Needless to say, not everyone welcomes this assessment. Feiler notes that according to Brueggeman and other scholars, "the percentage of believers who would agree to the principle of spiritual parity among the faiths probably totals around two-thirds of Jews, half of Christians, and a third of Muslims (p. 202). Another problem with interfaith dialogue, according to Feiler, is that it often results in "bland paeans to loving one's neighbor" or striving toward some mystical "spiritual oneness." Feiler quotes Harvard's Jon Levenson who says, "90 percent of interfaith dialogue is bunk" (p. 203).

What Feiler advocates, on the basis of the scholars he consulted, is that a new type of conversation is needed—one that does not minimize differences but accentuates them. Feiler believes the leaders of interfaith initiatives need more than just "mandates and dictums." He proposes a "common source." That source for Feiler is, of course, Abraham. Feiler reveals that he found in Abraham his own personal anchor.

He states, “I needed to believe that loving God, that being prepared to sacrifice for that belief, and that believing in peace had not somehow become incompatible.... *I needed Abraham*” (Italics mine, p. 215).

It is not, as Feiler maintains, that Abraham is a perfect vessel for interfaith reconciliation, “but he is the best vessel we’ve got.” Abraham is, after all, the root of the common heritage of the three major western religions. In many respects, Abraham’s descendants have become as numerous as the stars. And yet, I agree with Feiler when he says that Abraham’s greatest contributions may still be in the future. “Abraham is the seed of hope” (p. 226). If you believe, as I do, that interfaith dialogue, understanding, and cooperation is a necessary step toward the eradication of fear and hate, and toward the establishment of peace, friendship, and even love in our communities, then this book is a must-read. I look forward to discussing it with you further after you have read it, as we work together to bring healing, peace, prosperity, and freedom to ALL of God’s children in all lands. Ken yehi ratzon—May this be God’s will!

## President’s Message

Susan Goldstein, President

Dearest TBS Family,

As I write this we are entering into the third year of the challenges of the COVID-19 virus. I don’t know about you, but I haven’t seen my grandchildren or great-grandchildren for over two years. In fact there’s one I haven’t even met -- and I miss them. And we haven’t been together as a *kehillah*/community in almost that long -- and I miss each of you. Unfortunately, we’ll have to wait a bit longer to be together in person.

The case numbers in our area are not good right now. Because of that, your Board of Trustees has accepted the recommendation of the Reopening Committee that we operate virtually in January. The Reopening Committee will reassess the numbers prior to our February services and make its recommendations to the Board before our February 12 Shabbat morning service. That service is scheduled to be our own Sheri Stock’s *Bat Mitzvah*, so we are especially hopeful that we can be together -- masked and socially distanced -- but in person. Whether together in person or virtually (and I’ve shared in several virtual *B’nai Mitzvot* in the past couple of years), we’ll celebrate Sheri’s *simcha*.

Let’s remember that we are so fortunate to be part of a *kehilla kedosha*, a sacred community that shares our good times and sad times with each other. We rejoice and comfort. We are truly family.

Susan

## TBS Sisterhood

Sheri Stock, Sisterhood President

I hope that everybody had an amazing Hanukkah and a terrific new year! Sisterhood will be planning on making challah together as soon as we safely can again. We will be playing virtual trivia on Saturday February 19th at 6:00 pm. March is coming up quickly and that means it's almost time for Purim!

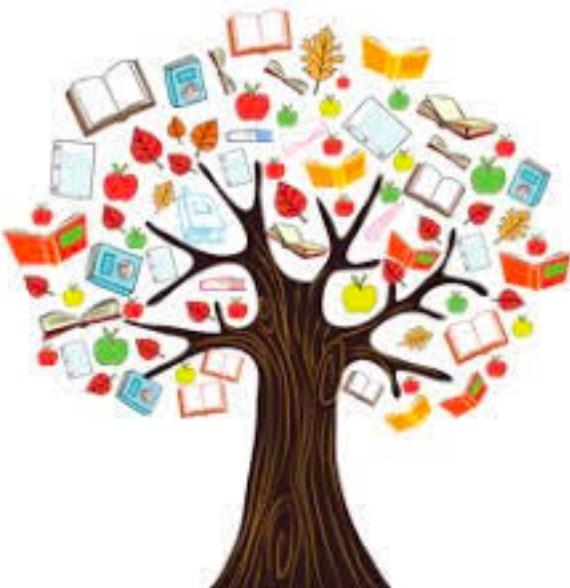


If anybody is interested in helping make hamantaschen to send to kids at college or deliver to seniors in need, please let me know. Until we can see each other again, stay safe and warm!



## TBS Sunday School Program

Kathy Jones, Sunday School Principal



Sunday School will continue to meet according to the dates in the 2021-2022 TBS Calendar. However, classes will be only virtual, due to the pandemic. We look forward to the time when COVID is behind us, and we are safe to meet in person again! The next Sunday School class is this Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM. As always, the Zoom invitation will be sent to parents and students shortly ahead of time. If you would like to know more about the TBS Sunday School, please contact Kathy Jones, Sunday School Principal, at [krsjones2002@yahoo.com](mailto:krsjones2002@yahoo.com).

## 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, 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 15<sup>th</sup>. Awards should be mailed to recipients by May 31st.

The essay should be emailed to any of the committee members: Lin Gentry, Karen Ferguson, 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 will be Wednesday, January 12th at 6:30pm via Zoom. Board meetings are open to all temple members. Contact Susan Goldstein if you wish to join the meeting.

Board members are:

### Officers:

Susan Goldstein, President  
Barbara Laufer, Past President  
Tiffany Hull, Vice President  
Susan Rieder, Treasurer  
Lin Gentry, Secretary

### Members at Large:

Liz Correll  
Mary Lee Tosky  
Karen Ferguson  
Derek Cooperberg  
Sheri Stock  
Susan Tiger Huitt  
Jodi Lavin-Tompkins

### Donations

#### In memory of Elaine Zerden

Susan Goldstein  
Mr & Mrs George Moretz  
Anne Arnold  
Edward and Allison Wheeler  
Barbara Freiman

#### Memorial Board

Burt Sederholm

**TBS Gives through Donations**

**Our donation for the month of December was sent to Kwanzaa Family Inn. January donation went to The Salvation Army.**

**Please consider these funds for your next donation:**  
**Building and Grounds Security**  
**Sunday School**  
**Community Relations and Social Action**

**Do you have a favorite charity you would like us to donate to? Let us know.**

When we all get back to temple in person again, please consider pairing with a board member(s) to host a weekend at Temple Beth Shalom. When members contribute to the life of our synagogue in this way, we all feel a part of our Jewish community and an active participant in assuring its well-being.



**Temple Beth Shalom has an active membership in the Catawba Valley Interfaith Council, where Rabbi Dennis serves as president. You can find out more about this organization and its activities at: <https://www.facebook.com/CVICNC/>.**

## TBS Community Mitzvah Projects

In the month of December the TBS Community Relations and Social Action Committee assisted in helping the Kwanzaa Family Inn, a 24/7 emergency shelter and transitional housing program in Lenoir, NC. Of the 24 women and children residing at the facility, 14 tested positive COVID in the same week. To control the transmission of the virus everyone needed to stay isolated in their rooms and avoid common areas. This also required that they stay out of the kitchen. Many disposable paper goods and outside prepared meals were needed to help them through this critical time. TBS purchased and delivered \$175 worth of disposable items along with enough home cooked chicken pot pies and fruit cobblers to serve everyone for one of the meals. The staff and residents were extremely grateful! Everyone has since recovered except for one newly infected resident. She is thus far handling the disease well. Your prayers for the Kwanzaa staff and residents would be most appreciated!

If you have items or funds for our on-going tikkun olam work, please contact Kathy Jones, [krsjones2002@yahoo.com](mailto:krsjones2002@yahoo.com)

## UPCOMING JEWISH HOLIDAYS



**Monday, January 17, 2022**

The 15th of Shevat on the Jewish calendar is the day that marks the beginning of a “new year” for trees.



Begins evening of **Wednesday, March 16, 2022**  
Ends nightfall of **Thursday, March 17, 2022**

## TBS Member Business Directory

*Let us know if you would like to list your business here in the Bulletin. It is a free benefit of TBS membership*

**Dr. Laura Faruque**  
A Woman's View  
915 Tate Blvd SE  
Suite 170  
Hickory, NC 28602  
828-345-0800

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

**Scott and Julie Owens**  
Taste Full Beans Coffeehouse  
29 2nd St NW  
Hickory, NC 28601  
828-325-0108  
[www.tastefullbeans.com](http://www.tastefullbeans.com)

**Dr. David Peltzer**  
Newton Family Physicians  
767 West First Street  
Newton, NC 28658  
828 465-3928  
[www.newtonfamilyphysicians.com](http://www.newtonfamilyphysicians.com)



## Temple Beth Shalom Life Cycle January Events

### Birthdays

David Jones 1/1  
Werner Locke Cohn 1/4  
Liz Correll 1/7  
Alice Guy 1/12  
Jaimi Jones 1/20  
Deane Griffin 1/21  
Rachel Igdal 1/25  
Madeleine Guy 1/25

### Anniversaries

Mark and Laura Faruque 1/6  
Pete & Ginny Sobotkin 1/31  
Ashley and Grayson Cohn 1/26

### Yahrzeit

Mazal Dayan 1/1  
Samuel Dopkeen 1/4  
Moses Gitlin 1/10  
Dora Dopkeen 1/13  
Clara Setser 1/14  
Molly Sederholm 1/16  
Gwen Datnoff 1/17  
Harold Setser 1/20  
Charles Laufer 1/23  
Joe Guttler 1/27  
Ida Lippe 1/29

## Local and Regional Events



### Israeli Historian, Prof. Shmuel Feiner, to Shed New Light on the Haskalah in an In-Person Lecture March 24, 2022

Center welcomes the public to an in-person presentation by Prof. Shmuel Feiner (Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan) on "The Haskalah Project of Secularization: Challenging 'The Religious Turn.'" The event will take place at the Reich College of Education, Lecture Hall 124 ABC, on Thursday, March 24, at **4:30 p.m.** Prof. Feiner is one of the foremost authorities on the Jewish Enlightenment and among Israel's most distinguished historians. At Bar Ilan, he holds a professorship in Modern Jewish History as well as the prestigious Samuel Braun Chair for the History of the Jews in Prussia.

Prof. Feiner's talk will also function as the keynote address of the 2022 Southeast Studies Consortium Workshop that explores, among others, "The Haskalah and European Enlightenment Revisited." The lecture is open to the public and free of charge. **ASU's pandemic policies and mask requirements are in effect.** For more information, see [here](#) and contact the Center at [holocaust@appstate.edu](mailto:holocaust@appstate.edu) or 828.262.2311.

<https://holocaust.appstate.edu/events>



**SHALOM  
HARMON  
INSTITUTE**

Follow this link for information about upcoming online events at SHI: <https://www.hartman.org.il/programs/>

## Schedule for Rabbi Services and Sunday School 2022

For event updates, email: [info@hickoryjewishcenter.com](mailto:info@hickoryjewishcenter.com)

DATE		EVENT	BULLETIN DEADLINE
January	8	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM VIRTUAL ONLY</b>	January 1
	9	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM VIRTUAL</b>	
	21	<b>Friday Night Service 7:00 PM VIRTUAL ONLY</b>	
February	23	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM VIRTUAL</b>	February 5
	12	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM</b>	
	13	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	
	25	<b>Friday Night Service 7:00 PM</b>	
March	27	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	March 5
	12	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM</b>	
April	13	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	April 2
	9	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM</b>	
	10	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	
	16	<b>Passover Community Seder 6:00 PM (Saturday)</b>	
	22	<b>Friday Night Service 7:00 PM</b>	
May	24	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	May 7
	14	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM</b>	
	15	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	
	22	<b>TBS Annual Membership Meeting 10:00 AM (Sunday)</b>	
June	27	<b>Friday Night Service 7:00 PM</b>	June 4
	29	<b>Sunday School 10:00 AM</b>	
	5	<b>Shavuot Morning Service 10:00 AM (Sunday)</b>	
July	11	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM</b>	N/A
	12	<b>Sunday School Final Session/Party 10:00 AM</b>	
	24	<b>Friday Night Service 7:00 PM</b>	
	9	<b>Saturday Morning Service 10:00 AM</b>	
	22	<b>Friday Night Service 7:00 PM</b>	

Want to contribute to the TBS Bulletin? Send entries to Karen Ferguson at [karen.sederholm@gmail.com](mailto:karen.sederholm@gmail.com). All entries are reviewed by the TBS Board before publication.

