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TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

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News/Activities/Events

From the Bimah: Our Rabbi's Message

Rabbi Dennis Jones

Time to Develop an Attitude of Gratitude!!

With Thanksgiving, my absolute favorite American national holiday, just around the corner, I wanted to remind the congregation again about an amazing book on the benefits of giving thanks. Undoubtedly, **gratitude** is a quality that has been universally cherished. In the first century BCE, the Roman philosopher Cicero said, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." I have said many times that one of my many favorite things about the Jewish tradition is its emphasis on **thankfulness**. That, as we know, is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible. The tradition of saying a minimum of one hundred blessings a day goes back to the Talmudic period. The sages considered the verse, "Now, Israel, what does God, your God, ask of you? To walk in God's ways and to serve God." (Deut. 10:12) The Rabbis of the Talmud pointed out that the Hebrew word used for "what" in that verse, *mah*, could also be read as *meah*, "one hundred." Thus, they opined, the verse could be read as saying, "Now, Israel one hundred things (blessings) does God ask of you..." (*Menachot* 43b).

It is my firm conviction that keeping Adonai's laws brings multiple positive benefits not only to oneself, but also to the entire cosmos. That conviction has been strengthened by the book, *Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier* by Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D. (Houghton Mifflin Company, NY, 2007) Emmons, one of the leading scholars in the positive psychology movement, is a professor at the University of California at Davis. Prof. Emmons also serves as the editor in chief of the *Journal of Positive Psychology*. Emmons has been researching the benefits of gratitude since the late 1990's.

Now, one would assume that going through life with a grateful attitude would have a positive effect on psychological and emotional factors such as happiness, optimism, and positive relationships. But, more surprising is the connection that Prof. Emmons was able to make with **physical benefits**. *Thanks!* details the many experiments that Emmons and his colleagues have done over the years as a part of their research. Subjects were encouraged into a state of either gratitude or ingratitude through the use of journaling. Prof. Emmons' basic experimental structure was to divide subjects into three groups. One he called the "gratitude condition." A second group was termed the "hassles condition." And a third

group, a type of control group, was called the “events condition.” The details of each experiment vary slightly, but in general the variables are similar. Individuals in the gratitude condition were encouraged to keep a journal highlighting a minimum of five things per week that they saw as positive and for which they were grateful. The hassles group, as one might expect, were asked to keep a similar journal, with the exception that these individuals were instructed to record a minimum of five problems or hassles that they had dealt with in the previous week. The control group, or events condition, were merely instructed to keep a journal detailing five events of each week with no instruction as to positive or negative. Prior to the journaling, during the journaling, immediately after the journaling, and six months after the end of the journaling participants were rated on a host of indices, *both psychological and physical*. (*Thanks!*, pp. 27-30)

As might be expected, participants in the gratitude condition did show statistically significant increases on scales of optimism about the future, positive feelings about life in general, and overall happiness. The researchers also reported that as the gratitude group practiced focusing on positive blessings, they became even more keenly aware of the positive things occurring all around them. Similarly, the hassles condition individuals became more focused on negative circumstances. What was less expected by the researchers were the physical benefits that accrued to the gratitude group.

It was found that individuals in the gratitude condition reported getting more hours of sleep each night, spending less time awake before falling asleep, and feeling more refreshed upon awakening in the morning. (*Thanks!*, p. 33) Now, given an attitude of gratitude and its beneficial effect on sleep, it would only make sense that it would also have a positive effect on other bodily systems. It is well-known that people who have sleep disruptions show higher levels of stress hormones which often lead to compromised immune functioning. Prof. Emmons documents that heart rhythms associated with a state of gratitude are also markedly different from the rhythms observed during conditions of anger or even relaxation. Harmonious heart rhythms have been found to be indicators of cardiovascular efficiency, nervous system balance, enhanced immunity, and hormonal balance. Contrast this with the effects of negative emotions which are known to create a chain reaction in the body leading to blood vessel constriction, increase in blood pressure, and a weaker immune system. Prof. Emmons cites one study conducted by the Institute of HeartMath in Boulder Creek, California where participants were monitored physically after engaging in fifteen minutes daily of focusing on appreciation. The study found “a significant increase in levels of immunoglobulin A, the predominant antibody found in the nose and mouth that serves as the body’s first line of defense against viruses.” The same study also documented a 23% average reduction in the stress hormone cortisol as well as a 100% increase in the positive hormone DHEA, which seems to predominate in a positive psychological state of warmth or relaxation. (*Thanks!*, p. 73)

And, perhaps most interesting of all, is Prof. Emmons' contention that an attitude of gratitude can lead to the reduction of physical pain. To support this claim, Prof. Emmons points to a meta-analysis of twelve studies that Carnegie-Mellon health psychologist, Sheldon Cohen, performed. Cohen found out that through stimulating the release of “endogenous opioids,” positive emotions have the ability to reduce sensitivity to pain and increase pain tolerance. (*Thanks*, p. 76) Endogenous opioids are, of course, the brain’s own morphine-like substances which are secreted in response to pain or discomfort. And, if pain reduction alone is not enough of the motivation, how about an increase in clearer thinking and decision-making ability?! In a study conducted on physicians and medical students it was found that

positive emotions, such as gratitude, “lead to more efficient organization and integration of information.” This results in improved decision-making and creative problem-solving. (*Thanks!*, pp. 84-85)

Many of the claims made by Prof. Emmons’ book amazed me, but perhaps none more than this claim which *may render a scientific explanation for psychic communication*. I quote this paragraph in full so that you can get the full force of Emmons’ argument:

Recall that researchers have shown that gratitude and the related positive emotions of love and appreciation are associated with a smooth, ordered, coherent pattern in the heart’s rhythmic activity. What was left unsaid earlier was that the heart itself generates an electromagnetic field. In fact, the heart is the most powerful generator of electromagnetic energy in the human body, producing the largest rhythmic electromagnetic field of any of the body’s organs. The heart’s electrical field is about sixty times greater in amplitude than the electrical activity generated by the brain. Furthermore, the magnetic field produced by the heart is more than five thousand times greater in strength than the field generated by the brain and can be detected a number of feet away from the body, in all directions, using a device known as a magnetometer. Prompted by findings that a person’s cardiac field is modulated by his or her different emotional states, several studies have now documented that *the electromagnetic field generated by the heart may actually transmit information that can be received by others*. (Italics mine, *Thanks!*, p. 88)

For those who desire to reap the psychological or physical benefits of living a life focused on gratitude, Prof. Emmons discusses ten evidence-based prescriptions for becoming a more grateful individual. Chief among these is the gratitude journaling that Prof. Emmons used in so many of his experiments, but the other nine have many merits as well. Among those methods are prayers of gratitude, meditation to become more mindful of benefits and blessings, the use of visual cues/reminders, the use of positive self-talk, and the use of peer support. If you would like to open yourself up to the possibilities of what being more grateful can bring to you, **I would urge you to purchase and read this book**. I know you will *not* be disappointed!! (I’ve read it twice!)

President’s Message

Susan Goldstein, President

Limmud - from the Hebrew word meaning “to learn.”

On Sunday, November 7, hundreds of Jewish communities, large and small, will join together for one day of intercontinental Jewish learning. Powered by Limmud North America, this annual **Global Day of Jewish Learning** was launched in 2010 as an effort to connect Jews around the world in mutual appreciation of Jewish wisdom. This initiative is inspired by the vision and leadership of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, z”l.

This year’s Study Theme is **The Bonds Between Us**. Study materials are now available for individual download at www.limmudna.org. While many *kehillot* plan a day of learning

together, many of us can take advantage of the study guide and/or live-streamed lectures offered throughout the day. I registered early, have downloaded my study guide, and look forward to sitting in on some of the live-streamed classes. There is no charge for the study guide or classes (although donations are welcome).

In truth, I am not familiar with any of the lecturers and I can't attend all the sessions, but I love the idea of learning with other Jews around the world. I hope that some of you will join me. Maybe next year, we can form one or more *chavrutas* (study groups) and engage in serious Jewish discussions. Think about it.....

I hope that you and those who are dear to you enjoy a joyous Thanksgiving.

Hugs to all,
Susan

TBS Sisterhood

Sheri Stock, Sisterhood President

Hello TBS Family!

The Sisterhood Craft Event is this Sunday, November 7, from 2:00 pm until 5:00 pm. We will have lots of different things to choose from including centerpieces, Hanukkah wreaths, and Wine and Design style painting. All synagogue protocols for in-person events will be in place. Please reserve your spot by emailing shererilisa@msm.com or krsjones2002@yahoo.com.

I am very excited to tell you that our **Annual Hanukkah Fair** is coming up soon! We are partnering with Temple Beth El again and they are sharing part of the proceeds with us! This year's Hanukkah Fair will have two components. The first is an online component. It will run from Sunday, November 7, through Saturday, November 13. When making your purchases, type in TBS21 at the time of checkout so we get a portion of the profits. Temple Beth El will bring everything purchased online to our synagogue on Sunday, November 14.

The second component is an in-person event. That will be on Sunday, November 14, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. Masks and proof of vaccination will be required to attend. The event will be set up to allow for social distancing.

Our next **Trivia Night** will be rescheduled after Hanukkah.

Shalom!
Sheri

TBS Sunday School Program

Kathy Jones, Principal

Sunday School has continued to meet by Zoom with our 10 students. It is difficult to stay engaged without being able to meet in person, but everyone has diligently attended to learn about our Jewish traditions and the Hebrew language. We thank their parents for their ongoing support!

We have **two schedule change announcements**. Sunday School will be meeting on Sunday, November 7, rather than November 14, and they will meet on Sunday, December 5, rather than December 12. The latter change will allow us to have our annual **Chanukah Bingo** during the holiday week! We will do the game virtually as we did last year, and the entire congregation is invited and encouraged to Zoom in and play with us! We have lots of great prizes, and we will work with each participant to get their prizes to them.

Our next class is this coming Sunday, November 7, at 10:00 am. If you would like to know more about the TBS Sunday School, please contact Kathy Jones, SS Principal, at krsjones2002@yahoo.com.

Community Relations and Social Action Committee

Kathy Jones, Chair

This past month, the Community Relations and Social Action Committee helped a recently rehoused family of four to furnish their home. They were referred to us by the Bridge Community agency. We were able to give them household supplies as well as buy the two children mattresses and bedding for their bunk bed. They were all very excited and grateful for the items. Thank you again to those who have donated household goods and to the CRSA Committee for finding this family's situation worthy of support. Also, a special thanks goes to Jaimi Jones who stores and transports most of the donations that we give to the homeless families who are referred to us.

If you have items or funds for our on-going *tikkun olam* work, please contact Kathy Jones, krsjones2002@yahoo.com



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Hanukkah Bingo: Save the Date!



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TBS Sunday School will once again be hosting our annual **Hanukkah Bingo** game! It will be held Sunday, December 5, 2021, at 10:00 am. Everyone is invited and everyone wins!

Though we cannot meet in person, we will play via Zoom as we successfully did last year! The Zoom invite will be sent out a few days before the event. If you can join us, please email Kathy Jones at krsjones2002@yahoo.com (or call her phone number listed in the membership directory) no later than Thursday, December 2, so that she can email or home deliver your bingo cards ahead of time!

UPCOMING SERVICES

Saturday, November 7, at 10:00 am

Friday, November 19, at 7:00 pm

Chanukah Candle Lighting on Sunday, November 28, at 7:00 pm via Zoom

TEMPLE BOARD

Our next board meeting will be Wednesday, November 17, at 6:30 pm via Zoom. Board meetings are open to all temple members. Contact Susan Goldstein (susanejgoldstein@gmail.com) if you wish to join the meeting. Board members are:

Officers

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

Members at Large

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

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