

Kallat Torah: Rebecca Katsh-Singer



At Temple Israel of Natick there is a community of Shabbat regulars; people who see each other every week; sometimes they talk with each other, sometimes not, but we always notice each other and feel known. Rebecca Katsh-Singer is a Shabbat regular. She, her husband Jordy and their three children attend services. Rebecca, Jordy and the girls are Torah readers. Rebecca and Jordy have also shared d'vrei Torah during the summer d'var Torah series. And Rebecca is active in our children's services, Tot Shabbat and Mini-Minyan. This week, via Zoom, I actually met Rebecca. We talked. I learned a lot about her and am now convinced that I was right—she is an extraordinary woman!

A native of Massachusetts, the mother of twin girls, Abby and Sarah, and Ari, a rambunctious six-year-old, she earned a PhD in science education, and is Coordinator of Science Education for the Westborough school system and on the faculty at Brandeis. A Hebrew speaker, she loves speaking Hebrew and sometimes speaks Hebrew with her kids. She takes pride in the fact that in Israel she can manage in Hebrew.

She has ascended through the rungs of Temple Israel leadership and is currently serving as Vice President for Education, because, “you know how you get sucked into these things... people asked, and I said yes!”

Fun fact-- Rebecca and her husband, Jordy, met at Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline and Stew and I met there too! After living and working in Denver for a few years, they ultimately moved to Natick because they found Temple Israel to be a place with an outpouring of love and assistance—“everyone takes care of each other.” During the best and worst of times, they step in seamlessly. Every member of her family feels comfortable at Temple Israel. Her children enjoy their ‘shul cousins,’ friends who are more than friends—like family for each other. She loves that Temple Israel is a warm and welcoming place and recognizes that we need to further address the needs of those who don't feel welcome. She says that “we should improve upon the things that are so wonderful.” She also thinks about extending our goals for inclusivity and more broadly accessibility by removing barriers.

As a science educator and deeply committed Jewish woman, I asked her about the intersection between science education and Judaism? Rebecca answered, “Science is fun! And “teaching science involves helping kids to find their place, see themselves as capable, be able to construct and critique ideas broadly and specifically. The teacher must create an atmosphere that ensures accessibility and equity.” We could easily replace science education with Jewish identity. Personally, I think that it's fun

to be a Jew. And fully developing one's Jewish identity means asking the hard questions, pursuing answers that are personally meaningful; feeling that the tradition is accessible and finding one's place in a Jewish community.

Perhaps it's in Rebecca's DNA! She has deep and scholarly Jewish roots. Her mother spent many years as a Jewish educator and her uncle was a Rabbi. Her grandfather established the Hebrew language program at NYU and his father was the Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikvah.

While Rebecca is a Shabbat regular at Temple Israel, she also knows many people from various groups within the synagogue. Her children attended the Judy Gordon Nursery School, she was active on the Ritual Committee and the Young Family Taskforce. And, of course, she knows those involved in lay-leadership too. She knows a lot of people here and for those who do not know her well, she'd like you to know that "this is very embarrassing for me! I'm not accustomed to being the center of attention."

Yes, Rebecca Katsh-Singer is an extraordinary woman—she's really smart, capable, friendly, caring and appreciative. I had a great time talking and laughing with her on Zoom. If you don't know her yet, make a point of getting to know her better—you'll be glad you did!

Hatan Bereshit: Rabbi Dan Liben



Temple Israel of Natick's Rabbi Daniel Liben will be this year's Hatan Bereshit honoree. He has been our Temple's spiritual leader for the past thirty years and will retire in June. He faces this milestone with mixed feelings but is eagerly looking forward to spending time with his nine young grandchildren.

You may think that you know all about Rabbi Liben, but I hope that you will learn some new things as you read further. Dan grew up in a fairly typical Conservative family in Valley Stream, Long Island, the third of four children. His family always had Shabbat dinner at home and often went to Shabbat morning services. He has great memories of Hebrew School. Dan always felt "very connected to Israel and Judaism." His maternal grandfather was a prominent Zionist in HaPoel HaMizrachi, the Modern Orthodox Zionist Movement. His mother's first language was Hebrew, and she lived, for a time in pre-state Palestine. Dan visited Israel for the first time in 1968, when he was 13. Rabbi Liben attended Haverford College and spent his junior year in Israel at Hebrew University. His parents made aliyah to Israel in the late 1980's. Today, his two youngest children, Jonah and Sara Miriam, live in Israel.

Rabbi Liben had many Jewish role models when he attended CEJWIN Camps as a boy. He originally thought that he would like to go into Jewish education. While taking a class at Bryn Mawr College, Haverford's sister school, one of his professors who had been a rabbi urged him to go to rabbinical school. He told him that being a rabbi would be a good credential to have. After a year or two at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Dan discovered that he really enjoyed working with families and individuals and decided that the rabbinate was the right fit for his skills and interests. He was ordained in 1983.

Rabbi Liben's first congregation was Temple Emanuel in Providence, Rhode Island. He was the assistant and then associate rabbi there. He loved working with families, and developed his passion for Family Education. In 1991 he and his wife Fran and their children moved to Natick where he has been Temple Israel's rabbi ever since. Every July, for eighteen years, Dan was a Rabbi at Camp Ramah of New England. His five children spent their summers there and he encourages parents to send their children to Jewish overnight camps.

Dan is a lifelong learner. He returned to school to learn to practice Jewish Mindfulness Meditation at Eylat Hayyim. He completed the 4th Rabbinic Leadership Cohort of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality

and IJS's Jewish Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Training Program. He trained at HUC in New York to become a Spiritual Director. He cofounded the Metrowest Jewish Meditation Collaborative. You can join Rabbi Liben at Sunday morning services, to participate in Jewish Mindfulness, or drop in on his Thursday morning Mindfulness sit. Dan is the past president of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, and of the New England Rabbinical Assembly, and is active in the Natick Clergy Association. And we shouldn't forget that he is also an avid Israeli folk dancer. "Our Israeli Folk Dance group is the longest running group at TI; every Wednesday or Thursday night for almost 30 years." Dan and Fran loved raising their family at TI. "Even though they went to Schechter, they felt connected to their TI friends through Junior Congregation and USY. To this day, they feel that TI is their second home."

In terms of retirement, our Rabbi has no immediate plans to move. He sees this as his community. There is much that he loves about TI. He feels that it has a "unique, roll up your sleeves, hands-on ethos. Congregants are willing to learn new Jewish skills. It is a safe place for people to experiment and expand their Jewish repertoire." He credits Rabbi Laureate Harold Kushner for creating a rational and kind culture and leaving the congregation in a healthy place. Dan is most proud of Temple Israel's strong commitment to Israel, its culture of adult and family education, and its creative approach to spirituality and prayer. He is also very proud of the religious school and early childhood center. "Regarding our professional staff, it's the dream team, and I feel blessed every day to be able to work with them!"

Reflecting on the past thirty years Rabbi Liben shared, "If I do move, it will be hard to find a community where I will love praying in synagogue as I do here. It may be hard to replicate in other places. There is an openness and spiritual connection. There are different modes of prayer people will try. We offer something for everyone." While we will miss Rabbi Liben leading us in prayer, it will be wonderful to have him sitting in the congregation davening amongst us.

Kallat Maftirah: Carolyn Goodman



“What’s been most important to me is to provide my children with a Jewish education and pass down to them and to my grandchildren my strong feelings for Israel and sense of Yiddishkeit,” said Carolyn Goodman, this year’s Kallat Maftir. These values and her unwavering commitment to the Jewish community have defined Carolyn’s entire life: as a Jewish educator, synagogue volunteer, Hadassah leader and life member, and mikveh guide at Mayyim Hayyim.

Transmitting these values *m’dor l’dor*, from generation to generation, reflects the example set by her parents. Carolyn grew up in a traditional Jewish home in the Dorchester section of Boston where her parents, who were active in the local Boston Jewish community, placed a strong value on Jewish education.

Carolyn’s formal Jewish education dates back to elementary school when she attended Rashi Academy, an Orthodox yeshiva that subsequently merged with the Maimonides School, where she was in the 4th high school graduating class. She is also a graduate of Hebrew College (then known as Hebrew Teachers College or HTC), where she studied while simultaneously studying for a secular undergraduate degree in secondary education at Boston State (now UMass Boston).

She began her professional career teaching English at the Patrick Gavin Junior High School in South Boston until the birth of her first child. When she and her late husband, Steve, moved to the MetroWest area in the 1960’s, Carolyn began a nine-year religious school teaching career at Temple Israel of Natick, which her three children -- Jeffrey, Alan, and Alissa -- also attended.

When her children grew older, Carolyn returned to school, earning a graduate degree in special education. In the late ‘70’s, she switched to school administration as a teacher/principal at Temple Aliyah in Needham – and was one of the first female Hebrew School principals in New England.

“My father believed strongly in giving me a solid education and he would say to me many times, ‘You don’t have to be the secretary, you can be the doctor; you don’t have to be the teacher, you can be the boss,’” explained Carolyn.

More than fifty years ago, Carolyn and Steve joined Temple Israel because they enjoyed the friendly atmosphere, Shabbat services, and Rabbi Kushner’s sermons. They subsequently made life-long friends at Temple Israel where they celebrated many simchas, including the *b’nai mitzvah* of Alan and Alissa (Jeffrey’s *bar mitzvah* was in Israel), Alissa’s marriage to David Talamo, and the *bat mitzvah* of their granddaughter, Ilana Talamo.

“The most rewarding aspect of being a member of Temple Israel is that I feel a strong sense of community and Jewish continuity,” said Carolyn, who has read Torah for more than 30 years at Shabbat services which she attends regularly.

Carolyn gets special pleasure from Temple Israel’s Adopt-A-Family Committee, which she has co-chaired for the past fifteen years. The project combines her desire to help others with her love for Israel nurtured since childhood. She still recalls that when the State of Israel was established in 1948, she and her classmates marched down Blue Hill Avenue from Roxbury to Mattapan, then a heavily Jewish neighborhood. “In those days we bought JNF stamps for 10 cents until we filled a sheet with a picture of a tree, which cost \$1.50.”

Since then, Carolyn has visited Israel 10 times. That includes trips with her grandchildren and studies at the Conservative Yeshiva and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

Since retiring ten years ago as educational director at Temple Beth Torah in Holliston, Carolyn remains involved in the Jewish community, and especially enjoys hearing from former students. Her greatest joy, though, are her five grandchildren and her new status as great-grandmother to Priscilla Yael, born this summer to Carolyn’s grand-daughter, Jessica.

Alissa Talamo sums it up, "Our mother has always made it a priority to transmit her love of Judaism to her children and grandchildren. She loves hosting multi-generational Rosh Hashanah dinners and Pesach seders, and her greatest joy has been taking each grandchild on their own bar or bat mitzvah trip to Israel. She has created special memories for each of us that we will always appreciate."