

עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רֵב  
FIND A RABBI



וּקְנֵה לְךָ חֵבֵר  
CREATE A COMMUNITY

Pirke Avot 1:6



Reflections by Rabbi Barbara Penzner  
on 28 years of leadership at  
Temple Hillel B'nai Torah

## INTRODUCTION

This narrative reflects Rabbi Barbara Penzner's reminiscences of her 28 years as the spiritual leader of Temple Hillel B'nai Torah, highlighting the accomplishments of Rabbi Penzner's years with her beloved congregation. It includes initiatives and events that the congregation co-created with Rabbi Penzner as well as ways the rabbi's leadership has influenced the culture of Hillel B'nai Torah.

The narrative incorporates several interviews journalist Judy Bolton-Fasman conducted with Rabbi Penzner in the winter and spring of 2022-23. Judy read the rabbi's writings and interviewed friends and colleagues. Thanks to her attentive listening, the narrative includes background detailing the rabbi's development as a spiritual leader and social justice activist.

The narrative omits events and projects that the temple membership took on without rabbinic involvement, such as fundraising events and ongoing building renovations. It also leaves out synagogue programming for which the rabbi took main responsibility, including most Shabbat and holiday observances. Any errors in the account should be attributed to Rabbi Penzner.

To read more about Rabbi Penzner's legacy at HBT, please find information on the temple website, [www.templehbt.org](http://www.templehbt.org). The rabbi's blog posts are at: <https://rabbarbara.blogspot.com/> (entries from 2013-2019 are also on the temple website)

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Rabbi Barbara Penzner heard the clarion call of the rabbinate when she was 22 years old. That call remains strong and clear for Barbara after 28 years as Temple Hillel B'nai Torah's solo rabbi. It galvanizes her leadership at HBT as well as her spiritual life, social justice activism, interfaith and LGBTQ engagement, and her work for Reconstructing Judaism, the central body of the Reconstructionist movement.

Barbara's inspiration – the moment she knew she was meant to be a rabbi – came while attending Simchat Torah services at Temple B'nai Jehudah, the largest Reform temple in Kansas City where she was teaching Hebrew school. She was seated in the back row, and in the middle of the service someone offered her a Torah scroll. It was the first time she held the Torah, despite many years of enjoying Shabbat and daily prayer. “I looked up at the rabbis on the bimah, surrounded by children as I held the Torah, and I knew I wanted to be a rabbi right then and there.”

Just days after her encounter with the Torah scroll, she sent a letter to the Jewish Theological Seminary, where Conservative rabbis were trained. JTS replied that she was welcome to study at the Seminary, but it was 1979 (six years before JTS first ordained a class that included women), and they could not predict when the Seminary would ordain women as rabbis. Barbara decided to investigate Hebrew Union College, the Reform rabbinical school, which had ordained Rabbi Sally Priesand in 1972.

Living in Washington DC, in the spring of 1980, Barbara applied to HUC's New York City campus. Her application was rejected, a silver lining, in that she knew she would not feel altogether comfortable as a Reform rabbi. Yet the dream of becoming a rabbi remained. Thanks to Rabbi Max Ticktin, whom she knew from graduate studies at George Washington University and from the *Fabrangen Havurah*, she looked into the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) in Philadelphia. Two years after HUC's rejection, she was accepted there and to the rabbinical school at RRC. Having chosen the warm community of RRC, she made the Reconstructionist movement her home. She not only served Reconstructionist congregations, but that was the place where she honed her leadership skills, including as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA) and chair of multiple RRA and movement committees and commissions.

Barbara points to the moment that her faith first surfaced when she was ten years old, sitting under a tree at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, the first of the Conservative movement's network of Ramah summer camps. In her Personal Offering to the congregation during her final Yom Kippur service she shared her formative spiritual awakening:

*I was sitting under a shady, leafy elm tree on a beautiful summer morning in the north woods of Wisconsin. The grassy hill before me was still, undisturbed*

*by the playful shouts of campers. Everyone was indoors somewhere at our daily morning prayers. Soon we would gather in the chadar ochel (dining hall) for breakfast. But for now, I was alone under that tree.*

*Why wasn't I indoors with the others? It was one of those mornings when our age division had tefila beyachid—permission to pray on our own. On those rare mornings we could commune with God anywhere on the campgrounds, without direction, without a book if we wanted.*

*As I sat under that tree in quiet contemplation, it came to me. God is knowledge.*

The theology of that Ramah moment was further shaped by her deep exploration of Reconstructionist Judaism's ideology, and the writings of the movement's founder, Mordecai Kaplan. As a rabbi, the meaning of God's presence in her life continues to evolve. "God gives us knowledge and is an abstraction," she observes. "God is not a being but a conduit, an experience, a force that guides us to become our best selves."

### **The Launch of a Rabbinic Career in Boston**

Barbara was among the first 200 women who were ordained as rabbis in the United States when she graduated from RRC in 1987. She had offers to serve congregations in Washington, DC, and Philadelphia, but she and Brian chose to move to Boston. She was the first rabbi of the Greater Boston Reconstructionist Havurah, later named Shir Hadash, in Newton.

By the end of her first year at Shir Hadash, Barbara and Brian welcomed Aviva, their older child, in 1988. Aviva was named for Barbara's father who had passed away on the second day of Rosh Hashanah as she conducted her first High Holy Day services as an ordained rabbi. In 1991, her fourth year as rabbi of Shir Hadash, the community split, leading to the formation of a second Reconstructionist synagogue in Newton, Congregation Dorshei Tzedek. Coincidentally, in her last days at Shir Hadash, Toby Pugh invited Barbara to teach at Hillel B'nai Torah on Shavuot. Who could have foretold how that event would impact her and the future of HBT?

In the meantime, Barbara became the rabbi of Conservative congregation Tifereth Israel in Lawrence. On Shabbat morning she and her family commuted to Lawrence and on weekdays she commuted into Boston as the part-time Director of the Commission on Jewish Continuity at Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP). Under her leadership, Tifereth Israel made a pivotal move from its historic building in Lawrence to a new home in Andover, bringing together the congregation's senior members with newer younger families.

However, after two years at Tifereth Israel, Barbara was offered a dream opportunity when she was accepted into the prestigious Jerusalem Fellows. The fellowship was a two-year program that brought Jewish educators from across the globe to study together in Hebrew for two years. By then, she and Brian were expecting their second child, Yonah, who was born in Jerusalem in November 1993. Barbara, Brian, and Aviva arrived in August, just before the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords, and Yonah, which means “dove” in Hebrew, was a reminder of the vision of peace that gave their time in Israel so much hope and promise for the future.

Toward the end of those magical two years, Laurie Rotman, co-chair with Ruth Lederman of the Rabbinic Search Committee at HBT, took advantage of a springtime trip to Jerusalem with her family to interview Barbara for the rabbi position at Temple Hillel B'nai Torah. The Search Committee, made up of older and younger members of the community of just over 100 families, had been conducting an extensive search for HBT's next rabbi without success. Barbara was invited to a second interview after she and her family returned from Israel in July of 1995. Dave Schraft, one of the respected elders on the search committee, declared after the interview, “Now that’s a rabbi!”

### **Temple Hillel B’nai Torah’s Past**

Temple Hillel B’nai Torah was founded in 1970 as the result of a merger between two Conservative congregations, Temple Beth Torah and Temple Beth Hillel. In 1949, Beth Torah was in West Roxbury and known as the Parkway Jewish Women’s Club, Jewish women seeking a peer group in the heavily Irish Catholic neighborhood. A year later, the men formed the Parkway Jewish Men’s Association. By 1955, the members of Temple Beth Torah had purchased the current building on Corey Street, once the home of the Decelle family who ran Decelle’s department store on Centre Street. Beth Torah hired Rabbi Oscar Bookspan and Cantor Simon Erdman and joined the Conservative movement. By 1960, the congregation had grown and added a wing with a new social hall and a sanctuary, where legend has it, the members were still laying the tile floors the night before Rosh Hashanah. Among the stained-glass windows in the lobby was a dedication to Eleanor Roosevelt as well as a window in memory of President John F. Kennedy, dedicated by the Temple Teens. The windows are still displayed in HBT's lobby.

Beth Hillel was a large congregation established decades earlier on Morton Street in Mattapan, whose historic building also housed the Dorchester-Mattapan Hebrew School. In one of the saddest chapters of Jewish history of Boston, chronicled in [Death of an American Jewish Community](#) by Hillel Levine and HBT member Larry Harmon, in the 1960s the Jews of Dorchester and Mattapan fled from their beloved Jewish

neighborhood. Redlining and fearmongering grew, and banks and realtors sold homes at a great profit to families of color. Jewish families left for communities such as Sharon and Newton without any protest from Jewish leaders. After most other synagogues had already relocated, the leadership of Beth Hillel made a secret deal to sell their building overnight without informing their rabbi.

Beth Hillel brought its many Torah scrolls, massive Torah reading table, historic plaques, and a fistful of cash to the new congregation renamed Temple Hillel B'nai Torah. The new congregation thrived into the 1980s with Rabbi Bookspan serving until his retirement in 1986. But as the next generation of Jews left the city of Boston, HBT's membership declined, the Hebrew School closed, and the congregation engaged a part-time rabbi, Eliot Somers.

The 1980s also brought younger families to West Roxbury and Roslindale who intentionally chose to live in the city. Many sent their children to Jewish day schools. Seeing the HBT community as an older population with a very traditional rabbi, these families formed the independent West Roxbury Chavurah. When Harold Gordon, a longtime temple leader, heard the Chavurah met at the police station, he invited them to use the synagogue building instead. Soon members of the Chavurah joined Hillel B'nai Torah and gradually changed the temple's face. By 1991, the congregation succeeded in passing a historic, though somewhat delayed, resolution to count women in a minyan and allow them to participate fully in services. Rabbi Somers remained until 1995.

### **Changes at HBT**

Barbara's arrival in 1995 heralded a new direction for the congregation. After her first year, the congregation joyously welcomed her as HBT's part-time spiritual leader and Rabbi Art Green spoke at her festive installation. A professor at Brandeis at that time, Rabbi Green had taught Hasidic thought to Barbara at RRC while he served as Dean, and later, President of the College. The theme of the day was "Find a Teacher, Acquire a friend," a quote from Pirke Avot.

Within a few years, David Trietsch, director of JRNI (Jewish Resources Network Initiative of CJP), identified HBT to receive communally funded consulting and financial support. With David Trietsch's guidance, the congregation developed the statement of principles that still guides the congregation today, emphasizing: ***Havurah – Community, Avodah – Worship, Torah – Learning, and Tikkun Olam – Social Justice.***

Additionally, JRNI assisted community leaders in restructuring temple governance and making the dues structure more accessible. In the spirit of religious and financial

egalitarianism, HBT instituted an income-based model for dues. “We’re a congregation that crosses class lines,” Barbara observes. “Welcoming members regardless of their financial contribution has been a hallmark of the community.”

The congregation also began to attract families from the emerging Jewish community in the Boston neighborhoods of Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, and Dorchester, as well as the adjacent suburbs of Newton, Brookline, and Needham. Thanks to the members of the Chavurah and their “Sunday Funday” events for parents of pre-school children and the annual family retreat in Craigville on Cape Cod, younger families were drawn to the temple.

In 1996, local activist Lew Finfer and temple leader Ashley Adams encouraged Rabbi Penzner to make HBT the first Jewish organization to participate in the founding of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) and the congregation followed their rabbi into more social activism.

## **HAVURAH: COMMUNITY**

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

One of Mordecai Kaplan’s most oft-quoted teachings is “Belonging precedes believing and behaving.” All three aspects of Jewish life co-exist in the HBT community. However, the value of Havurah, building and nurturing community, has always been at the heart of HBT’s missions. When Rabbi Penzner arrived at HBT, the importance of seeing, welcoming, and engaging every individual was demonstrated daily by beloved veteran members like Libby and Joe Robinson. This welcome mat not only brought in new members, but created an environment of belonging, encouraging people to explore what they believed and how they behaved. As Mordecai Kaplan was known to say, “Belonging precedes believing and behaving.”

But creating a feeling of belonging takes work. As early as 1999, the temple grappled with questions around two cutting-edge issues: the involvement of non-Jewish partners in the synagogue and welcoming same-sex couples to celebrate commitment ceremonies in the sanctuary.

### **Creating a Home for Interfaith Families**

Responding to the growing number of interfaith families, the congregation grappled with how best to support their involvement in the temple. What sort of ritual and membership parameters should be in place? In the 1998 report of the Gesher (Bridge) Committee, formed to explore the role of non-Jews in congregational life, the temple

agreed that partners who were not Jewish could come up to the bimah (pulpit) for a Torah honor along with a Jewish partner. The community wanted to support and affirm all families in in HBT's community who were raising their children as Jews. The Geshet Committee report not only welcomed non-Jews to participate in ritual practices, but spearheaded a change in the by-laws to give a vote to non-Jews who were married to Jews.

Twenty years later, the temple community voted yet again to change the by-laws in 2021. The new committee introduced the term *ger toshav*, a Hebrew phrase from the Torah meaning “fellow travelers in the community,” as a more welcoming and respectful frame than “non-Jews.” The group recommended that a *ger toshav* be given equal access to board membership. Future discussions will likely raise the question of whether a *ger toshav* can be president of the congregation, or whether someone not part of a Jewish family can become a temple member.

### **Welcoming the LGBTQ+ Community**

In 1999, Susan Tatelman and Anne Steinman wanted their marriage to be blessed by the rabbi in the synagogue’s sanctuary; their request launched a conversation about whether the mandate of a welcoming congregation extended to allowing same sex marriage ceremonies to take place in the building. Rabbi Penzner had been officiating at commitment ceremonies since her first days as a new rabbi. Beginning in the 1980s, while Barbara was a student at RRC, the Reconstructionist movement was at the forefront of welcoming gay and lesbian rabbis and promoting inclusion.

Using a uniquely Reconstructionist approach, based in “Values Based Decision Making,” the rabbi met with a small group of congregants over several months to discuss the matter. In the end, understanding the rabbi’s support for full inclusion, yet wary of deciding on behalf of the congregation, the board chose to support the rabbi in officiating as she deemed appropriate. That decision arrived too late for Susan and Anne, though Rabbi Penzner officiated at their wedding in 1999 in the sanctuary at Temple Israel, Boston. Two other temple couples also celebrated commitment ceremonies with the rabbi that year.

In time, welcoming the LGBTQ community throughout temple life became an established norm, symbolized by a rainbow flag in the lobby and annual Pride Shabbat celebrations. “HBT’s welcoming of LGBTQ people is part of its identity as a welcoming community. The congregation was prescient in so many ways,” says Rabbi Penzner. To deepen their understanding, temple leaders joined the rabbi in trainings offered by Keshet: LGBTQ+ Equality in Jewish Life. HBT continues to examine how to



demonstrate more openness to trans and non-binary people among the congregation and in the Chaverim School.

### **Welcoming Multi-Racial Families and Advocating for Racial Justice**

In keeping with Boston's changing demographics, people of color also joined the congregation. "The voices of people of color are very important to us. We've grown a lot and made those voices heard."

Kassa Belay, son of an Ethiopian father and a white Jewish mother, entered the Chaverim School and in 1999 became the school's first bar mitzvah. Other multi-racial families, many connected through the Jewish Multi-Racial Network, began bringing their children to HBT. Thus began a long journey of education, awareness, and welcome that continues to contribute to HBT's identity.

In 2007, the temple and Union United Methodist Church explored a relationship, thanks to the initiative of Beilah Ross, an HBT member and singer in the UUMC choir. Reverend Martin McLee led Union, an historic African-American Church in the South End established in 1818. Members of both congregations partnered to create a festive and compelling Liberation Seder. Union's famed gospel choir added their joyful songs to the Haggadah's Jewish melodies. The seder featured a traditional Jewish plate and a Liberation seder plate that included black-eyed peas and sweet potatoes, among other traditional African-American foods.

In an introduction to the seder, Rabbi Penzner wrote:

*This seder is not a Jewish seder, but it is based on the Jewish traditions. It is not an act of one community inviting another to learn or to share about our customs. Rather, it is a project jointly developed to create connections between our past, our present and, our future. This seder will leave out some familiar parts of the haggadah, the traditional "telling" of the Passover story. It will also include some new and stimulating readings and symbols. We hope that by the end of this evening, we will all have come to new understandings, developed friendships, and arrived at a deeper understanding of the meaning of liberation and the long road we all must take to arrive there.*

The two groups continued to celebrate the Liberation Seder under the leadership of the new pastor, Rev. LaTrelle Easterling, when she and the rabbi reaffirmed their partnership in 2010. Since that time, HBT members have been regular attendees at the annual MLK Breakfast that Union and St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church founded in 1970. It took some time for Rabbi Penzner to understand fully what it meant to welcome Black Jews and their families to HBT. Thanks to Miriam Messinger, who spoke out after the

killing of Trayvon Martin and then Eric Garner, the rabbi further educated herself about systemic racism and white supremacy to better lead the community. The effort to understand racism and acknowledge our own roles in perpetuating racist systems spread throughout the congregation. HBT began by deploying an outward-facing approach to understand racism and how to repair the world. The congregation then intentionally turned inward, looking at how the congregation and its policies, building, and culture needed to change to become anti-racist.

Josh Frank was among the leaders who brought educational programs on race into the congregation. He was instrumental in bringing HBT into partnership with Theodore Parker Unitarian Universalist Church, and other West Roxbury religious communities, to promote discussions of race in West Roxbury. The Parkway Interfaith Conversations on Race organized a large gathering of West Roxbury neighbors in HBT's sanctuary in November 2019 where every speaker was a person of color. "A Path to Healing Our Communities: Understanding Restorative Justice" featured speakers Suze Maze Rothstein, Suffolk University Restorative Justice Program, Rahsaan Hall, the Massachusetts ACLU, and Rachael Rollins, who was Suffolk County District Attorney at the time. The sanctuary was overflowing with neighbors of different faiths from around the Parkway.

In the midst of the temple's reflections on race, Miriam's son Rami Hayes-Messinger, who is bi-racial and grew up at HBT with his older sister Amani, petitioned the temple board to place a Black Lives Matter banner on the temple's facade. He was nearing his bar mitzvah and believed the message of Black Lives Matter, found on banners at local churches, was essential to affirming that he belonged fully to this community. The temple board could not come to an agreement about Rami's request. In an article published in eJewish Philanthropy online, Rabbi Penzner described the issues:

*Placing a banner outside would imply that we stood together as a congregation and were prepared to face opposition by our neighbors, many of whom are Boston police officers. Ignoring the request meant that we refused to hear the pained voices of our own members and had abandoned our commitment to tzedek. What did our work to end racism truly mean to this congregation?*

Additionally, members were concerned about the synagogue's tenuous place in the West Roxbury community and feared that in this dark period of American politics, the temple façade would need multiple banners to support various causes and groups under attack. The board spent six months discussing the topic, then asked a small group of leaders, including social justice activists and a person of color, to consider all sides of the debate.

In the end, the board accepted, and the congregation affirmed the committee's recommendation to raise a banner outside the building that reflected a broad Jewish commitment based on a passage in the Torah: "Tzedek tzedek tirdof – Justice, Justice You Shall Pursue." They also affirmed that a Black Lives Matter sign could join the rainbow flag and other signs in the temple lobby as a focus for internal conversation. Although his petition for an outdoor banner did not succeed, Rami created a bright yellow sign that proclaimed Black Lives Matter, as well as support for immigrants, trans, and other marginal groups.

In 2020, following the horrific death of George Floyd, that bright yellow sign in the temple's lobby found its way to the weekly Black Lives Matter Vigil at the Holy Name Rotary, across from the Police Station. HBT and members of Theodore Parker Church led the vigil. By mid-summer, the temple board affirmed the need for a Black Lives Matter sign on the temple building. The sign speaks volumes about HBT's commitment to racial justice to be a safe home for everyone, including people of color.

Responding to concerns among some Jewish leaders who found that parts of the platform of the Movement for Black Lives were anti-Israel, the rabbi wrote:

*The Movement for Black Lives has a noble and expansive purpose that is not targeting Jews or the Jewish state. The essence of the platform is a sound call to action. It is worth a full discussion of its points. Jewish disagreements with the language should lead us to share our pain, ask questions, and continue to talk and work honestly with leaders of that movement to advance equity and justice in America.*

## **Disability Rights**

In 2018, CJP invited HBT to participate in the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project, which provides grants to synagogues for creating greater access for people with physical and cognitive disabilities in congregational buildings and programs. A newly created inclusion committee, named *Kavod l'kulam*, Respect for All, applied for RSIP grants that have improved accessibility, including a mobile chair on the stairs from the sanctuary upstairs to the social hall downstairs. HBT continues to focus on inclusion, with special emphasis on raising awareness around mental health in the general community and attending to various learning styles within the Chaverim School.

## **A Reconstructionist Congregation**

Hillel B'nai Torah was historically part of the Conservative movement. Sometime in the late 1990s after the rabbi arrived, the national organization of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism determined that the synagogue was not able to pay movement

dues at the level they considered appropriate. Despite protestations from the local region, USCJ unceremoniously disaffiliated HBT.

In 2001 the congregation made the momentous decision to increase the rabbi's position from part-time to full-time. As part of the rabbi's new agreement, the HBT leadership committed to exploring affiliation with a movement. HBT members began yet another values-based decision-making process. Engaging the entire the congregation in "community conversations" over the course of two years, co-chairs Bil Zarch and Jean Weinberg brought representatives from the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements to speak to temple members. Some in the temple wanted to remain independent and unaffiliated. Having become familiar with Reconstructionist ideology and practices for many years, the committee recommended affiliation with the Reconstructionist movement. The congregation voted overwhelmingly in 2003 to become a Reconstructionist synagogue. "It was a tremendous vote of confidence in me," Barbara recalls gratefully.

That decision brought HBT closer to other local Reconstructionist communities, and they began collaborating on services and events such as Selichot and Shavuot. However, one vestige of the Conservative past remained. Though the rabbi had already introduced new Shabbat prayerbooks and new High Holy Day *machzorim*, including a Reconstructionist siddur for Friday nights, a vocal minority of the congregation wanted to continue using a Conservative prayer book. When a family generously donated many *Kol Haneshamah* Reconstructionist prayer books to HBT in appreciation of their daughter's bat mitzvah, the congregants who had opposed new siddurim rightly felt left out of the decision-making process. A compromise was struck, and the rabbi called out page numbers for both prayer books.

However, over time many adapted to the new siddur. The congregation uses Reconstructionist prayerbooks exclusively, including the daily siddur and siddur for a House of Mourning. In place of the *Kol Haneshamah machzor* (which was too thick to fit in the book racks on the pews), congregants welcomed machzor "Renew Our Days for the High Holy Days," a variation created by Canadian Reconstructionist Rabbi Ron Aigen. Another generous congregant donated copies of the Renew Our Days siddur which is used for holiday services throughout the year. The last vestige of accommodating two prayer books is still noted in the *Aleinu* prayer, when people may choose from traditional and Reconstructionist versions found together in *Kol Haneshamah*. In recognition of personal choice members and guests also have the option to chant the blessings before the Torah in either the Reconstructionist or traditional versions.

## Values-Based Decision Making Continues

Since assuming the pulpit at Hillel B'nai Torah, Barbara has asked herself and her congregants the following questions: “How do we live our values as a Jewish community? How do values lead to action? And how are our values reflected in our mission, and even our synagogue budget?” A key part of Reconstructionist practice emphasizes the lay-rabbinic relationship. “As a Reconstructionist Jew, my goal has always been to be in partnership with my congregation,” Barbara says. “To me, this ideal distinguishes us from other movements.”

The deliberative process that led to affiliation with the Reconstructionist movement continues to shape the congregation’s approach to many important policy discussions, enlivening conversations about governance and ritual. In each discussion, education is a key component, both for those who are contributing to the discussion as well as for ways to raise awareness among temple members about the policy and the values that support it.

In 2005 Shelley Stevens and the rabbi began discussing the practice and meaning of providing kosher food in the building. The Kashrut policy that developed enabled members to bring home-baked cookies to meetings or arranging a pot-luck meal while also respecting and maintaining the temple’s kosher kitchen. The policy continues to evolve, but the focus is on values such as:

- Kashrut is a tool of Jewish identity and connects us to other Jews
- We have a responsibility to support those who keep kosher
- Kashrut is a spiritual practice that brings holiness to our meals
- Sharing a meal helps build community
- Our practice should not pose a financial burden to members
- The practice of kashrut should include taking care of the environment and minimizing waste.
- Eating together should bring enjoyment.

The next policy discussion between Shelley and the rabbi aimed to shape a more inviting atmosphere for Shabbat morning services. Among several changes, the Committee on Shabbat Morning Services (COSMOS) recommended shortening the service to two hours, which required omitting some prayers and the *haftarah* reading. The committee report also emphasized the importance of music and Torah study in services. That was the beginning of an evolution in prayer practices that continues to encourage participation, creativity, and spirituality in all services, as well as leading to occasional chanting and meditation services on Shabbat mornings.

## TORAH: LEARNING

### **Chaverim School**

In 1996, under the leadership of Claudia Harris, and with the full support of the Chavurah and the synagogue board, HBT revived its Hebrew school, renaming it the Chaverim School. Claudia led the school, with Rabbi Penzner collaborating on the curriculum.

Several different educators followed in Claudia's footsteps., Leah Gartner, Rebekkah Ralen, and Orna Sonnenschein brought new ideas to the growing school, under Rabbi Penzner's guidance. However, none of those professionals fully understood the Reconstructionist approach.

Hillary Pinsker Engler, who was a teacher in the school, was promoted to Education Director in 2011. Bringing her family into the congregation and sharing her own commitment to Reconstructionist Judaism, Hillary has created a foundation for the school that weaves together HBT's four pillars into the curriculum: **Havurah, Tikkun Olam, Avodah, and Torah.**

The Chaverim School's goals have always been to grow the school and integrate school families into the broader congregation. In 2011, the temple began hosting the unique "Shakin' Shabbat" Friday night program for preschoolers, with Rabbi Barbara sitting on the floor with infants, toddlers, and older siblings, telling stories, and jumping up and down while singing Hebrew prayers. At the end of each service, the kids open the ark to find stuffed Torahs which they hug, share with a friend, and then hug someone they love.

That year the school and temple began collaborating on *Kulanu Yachad* (all of us together), Shabbat and holiday events that aimed to include school families in congregational celebrations, and adults without children in the school to Sunday morning events. Some Kulanu Yachad events have become fixtures in the calendar, student-led services including MLK Shabbat with Hebrew psalms blended with civil rights anthems, packing and distributing *Shalach Manot* baskets to congregants for Purim, and matza baking in the temple kitchen for Passover.

In 2014, CJP became aware that the Boston neighborhoods of West Roxbury and Roslindale were attracting Jewish families with young children. Seeking to build on this demographic opportunity, CJP offered HBT a grant for funding an outreach coordinator for Families with Young Children. With the help of Emily Engler, HBT actively recruited families with preschoolers to Shakin' Shabbat, monthly Sunday morning *Parparim* classes, and PJ Havdalah, among other events.

Hillary and the rabbi partnered to engage parents in their own learning, which led to an annual series of Parent and Family Education programs for each grade. The rabbi also established office hours for parents to share questions. Rabbi Penzner visited classrooms to connect with the students. In recent years, the rabbi's office hours have extended to students who have individual questions. Everyone leaves with jellybeans.

Following the lead of the congregation early on, the school integrated a solid commitment to working for Tikkun Olam into its curriculum and b'nai mitzvah program. B-mitzvah students choose a mitzvah project to engage in during the year leading up to their ceremony and share what they've gleaned from it in their dvar Torah.

Each cohort of students did a group mitzvah project. For many years, families served meals to homeless women and their children at Rosie's Place. Families have also dedicated evenings to work at Cradles to Crayons, sorting, cleaning, and packing shoes, clothing, toys, and other essentials for children experiencing clothing insecurity. Hillary has also made inclusion a priority, including an intentional process to support students with special needs and recruit teachers who are passionate leaders to reflect HBT's diversity.

## **Adult Learning**

Life-long learning is another pillar of the HBT Community. When visitors came to Rabbi Penzner to learn about the congregation, she told them, "Your background or who you are makes no difference as long as you are open to learn and to grow." As she once noted that knowledge is a significant aspect of divinity, it is no wonder that teaching and learning have been holy and joyous life-long pursuits for Barbara. She takes great pleasure in sharing that process with adults.

HBT has hosted several courses sponsored by Hebrew College and funded by CJP, including the intensive two-year Me'ah program and Parenting Through a Jewish Lens series. The rabbi has offered a variety of workshops and courses, from a study group with the elders of the temple Sisterhood in the 1990s, to "How to talk to your children about God when you're not sure what you believe," to monthly *Mussar* groups, and a regular Shabbat morning Torah study group.

One highlight of life-long learning at HBT has been the celebration of Adult B'nai Mitzvah. The first group to celebrate as adults made up the temple's two-year intensive Me'ah program. The B'nai Mitzvah then studied with the rabbi for two years after completing the Me'ah intensive. Ten individuals celebrated Shabbat Rosh Hodesh in June 2004. They learned more than they could have imagined: chanting Torah and

haftarah, leading the prayers, and studying the Torah portion. Beloved member Allen J. Worters, whom his classmates dubbed “Reb Allen,” gave a moving dvar Torah on Korach, made more poignant by his struggle with cancer. When he died in 2005, his widow, Paula Doress-Worters, chose to honor his love of Jewish learning and established the annual Allen J. Worters Memorial Lecture.

Two years after that first class, a group of women led an Adult Bat Mitzvah service on Shabbat Shelach in 2006. Dianne Heitin celebrated her bat mitzvah in 2017. Finally, Benita Block, Sara Colb, Emily Engler, and Andi Lipman all celebrated their bat mitzvah in the spring of 2023. These events have strengthened the congregation and welcomed these women as temple leaders.

### **Temple Hillel B’nai Torah Goes to Israel**

One of the most important outcomes of the first Adult B’nai Mitzvah was the group’s desire to travel together to Israel. In 2007, Rabbi Penzner led Hillel B’nai Torah’s first congregational trip to Israel. HBT joined forces with Congregation Agudas Achim Reconstructionist synagogue in Attleboro, Massachusetts for a trip that covered the length and breadth of Israel. Visits to Eilat, the Negev Desert, the Dead Sea, Tsfat, and Haifa culminated in a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. “We circled the country and always symbolically faced Jerusalem,” the rabbi recalls.

For the next trip in 2018, the rabbi chose to travel with MEDJI tours, known for their dual-narrative lens. Two guides, an Israeli Jew, and a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem led the tour. The trip was billed as “A Little Bit of Heaven, Hardship, and Hope: Seeing Israel and Palestine with New Eyes.” Along with visiting Jewish sites, the group spent a day in Nazareth where they were hosted by Palestinian families overnight in Bethlehem, and toured parts of the West Bank. A highlight of the tour was a visit to the Sindyanna of Galilee Center. They learned about Sindyanna’s work to empower Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women and the center’s support of the local Arab olive growers to produce world-class olive oil.

Eager to have a family trip of their own with the MEJDI dual-narrative focus, a group of HBT families organized another trip to Israel in 2022 that included young people from age 15 to 26. Traveling in late December, the trip’s theme was “Finding the Light of Hope on Our Israel Journey. The group celebrated Shabbat and Hanukkah with Israeli Jews while “taking in difficult realities,” including the election of Israel’s new right-wing government.



The HBT contingent also learned about Israel from a Jewish Israeli who lives on a kibbutz and a Palestinian guide who hails from East Jerusalem. They toured the West Bank and East Jerusalem and again made a point to stop at Sindyanna.

Following the trip, Rabbi Penzner published a message to the congregation exploring the theme of light and hope:

*Our goal is “to create a crack in the wall of hatred and cruelty, to let the light come in.” That phrase came from representatives of The Parents Circle – Family Forum, an organization of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families who believe that reconciliation is a prerequisite to lasting peace. Bassan, a Palestinian from the West Bank, and Rami, an Israeli Jew from Jerusalem “were unlikely emissaries of hope,” says the rabbi. “[They] belong to a group that no one wants to join—a large community of Jewish and Palestinian parents who have all lost children to terror and conflict in Israel and Palestine and are tired of the endless cycle of loss of life. Their remarkable relationship across borders and bereavement inspired us to see their path to peace as a beacon in the darkness.*

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Throughout her leadership at HBT, Rabbi Penzner has served the Jewish community of greater Boston in myriad ways. She served as president of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis (MBR), represented Reconstructionist Judaism on the Synagogue Council Unity Shabbaton multiple times, co-chaired the New England Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) and led its annual Labor Seder, represented the JLC on Council of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and was honored with the organization's Community Service Award in 2016, contributed to Muslim-Jewish dialogue with representatives of the Islamic Society of Boston and Cultural Center (ISBCC), and advocated for issues on Beacon Hill through the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action (JALSA).

Below are some snapshots of community initiatives in which Rabbi Penzner has played a significant role.

### **Mayyim Hayyim: Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center**

Barbara's interest in the mikveh and its rituals began in 1983. She and her friend and colleague, Rabbi Amy Small, were both getting married and embraced the mikveh as a feminist ritual, creating a new ceremony for brides. That same year, Barbara met the

writer Anita Diamant when she answered Anita's query in *Moment Magazine* soliciting stories about new and creative Jewish wedding rituals. Those stories were the basis of Anita's classic book on the subject, *The New Jewish Wedding*, which included descriptions of many of Barbara and Brian's wedding rituals.

In 1987, the same year that *The New Jewish Wedding* was published, Barbara graduated from RRC and moved to Boston. Anita Diamant was the only person Barbara knew in town, and the two women became fast friends, often talking about everything from family life to Jewish practice while walking by the Charles River or on the phone while making dinner.

Anita recalls dreaming with Barbara of a mikveh opened to all people in the Jewish community. In a 1999 speech Barbara gave upon receiving the Synagogue Council's Community Service Award, she spoke about building a mikveh to serve all Jewish communities throughout Boston and beyond. In that speech she recounted:

*My own dream is to create a community-sponsored mikveh, west of Brookline, under the auspices of the Synagogue Council, where rabbis of all denominations can come any day of the week (except Shabbat) to bring individuals who wish to immerse and become Jewish, where women of all denominations can celebrate Rosh Hodesh together, where children from the New Jewish High School, and the Rashi School and the Schechter schools and Maimonides and the synagogue schools, can all come to learn about this powerful symbol of Jewish life without feeling that it belongs to someone else. Given what you [the Synagogue Council] have done so far, I do not believe that this is a dream alone.*

Barbara's words inspired Alan Teperow, then-director of the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, to help her convene rabbis from all the movements (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist) in 2000. Mayyim Hayyim's Seven principles emerged (available on the Mayyim Hayyim website [www.mayyimhayyim.org](http://www.mayyimhayyim.org)), and to this day drive the mikveh's vision and practices.

Rabbi Penzner notes this vision for the new mikveh then expanded, "We knew our mikveh would go beyond the idea of a woman's pre-marital and monthly immersions. We wanted to be a place for same-sex immersions before their weddings. We began to dream of the possibilities of using the mikveh for events such as healing from illness, gratitude for a milestone birthday, and creating rituals for b'nai mitzvah."

Building momentum, Anita followed Barbara's speech with one of her own in 2001, that became the basis of Mayyim Hayyim's talking points.

*I want a mikveh that encourages the prayers of the heart in Jews of every denomination and description,” Anita wrote. “A mikveh that would respect the choices and modesty of everyone who visits. A mikveh that would be beautiful in design and decoration—a welcoming and inviting place, from the minute you walk through the door.*

That year, Anita and Barbara, Paula Brody, Roz Garber, and Judy Green joined together as Mayyim Hayyim's first board, and were later dubbed the “Mikveh Mamas.” From there, they engaged Aliza Kline to become Mayyim Hayyim's first executive director who organized scores of women to contribute time, money, and energy to open Mayyim Hayyim’s doors in 2004.

On Mayyim Hayyim's board for ten years, Anita said, "Barbara was an active, thoughtful, practical, and rabbinic presence on the board—reminding us of the holiness of our mission. She is my cherished friend, also the person I consult to make sure my use of Hebrew terms and concepts are correct, and someone with whom I love to 'argue with for the sake of heaven.'"

### **Comforting a Grieving Community**

On July 31, 2002, a terrorist bomb detonated in the cafeteria of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Janis Ruth Coulter, who had led a group of students from the U.S. to study at the university, was one of six people killed in the attack. Janis was a Jew by choice who grew up in West Roxbury. She occasionally attended Temple Hillel B’nai Torah as a child with her grandmother who had converted to Judaism to marry Janis’ grandfather.

At age 30, Janis began to explore converting to Judaism with Rabbi Penzner's guidance. Janis went on to work for CJP and later for American Friends of Hebrew University. Within hours after her tragic death, Janis’ Episcopalian family in West Roxbury called on Rabbi Penzner to represent them when the news media descended. Two days after the bombing, she appeared on the *Today Show* and was interviewed by Wolf Blitzer on CNN, allowing Janis’ grieving parents and sister some privacy.

Janis was well-known throughout the Jewish community, and community leaders filled the HBT sanctuary where Rabbi Penzner officiated at Janis' funeral with a "pained heart." Rabbi Penzner eulogized that Janis was never afraid to travel to Israel. “Janis said that, ‘If something did happen, I would rather die as a Jew in Israel than by some random violence in the states.’” Rabbi Penzner spoke of her admiration for Janis, “and was always learning from her. I miss her smile, her deep convictions, her probing questions, and her loving presence. I think of Janis often, wondering what her life, and the life of the Jewish people, might have been had she not been taken so young.”

## **Boston Marathon Bombing**

When terrorism struck at the 117<sup>th</sup> running of the Boston Marathon in 2013, Barbara held her congregation close again. She wrote several messages over the course of that harrowing week:

*Our hearts are torn apart by the senseless act of hate and cruelty that took place at the finish line of the Boston Marathon today. No matter who did this, I have no other words to describe what took place, other than 'senseless,' 'hate' and 'cruelty.'*

*Who knows what we will learn tomorrow, whose names will appear among the dead and injured, what sacrifices were made by first responders, what acts of kindness strangers offered. Who knows how this noble tradition of the Boston Marathon will be changed, and how Patriot's Day will forever carry the awful memory of death and devastation. And despite the blood spilled, the spring flowers will brighten our path and the trees will continue to bud and flower. For now, we join together in prayer for healing, for comfort, for justice, and above all, for love and hope to carry us through.*

Rabbi Penzner stood with Boston clergy of all faiths at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross when President Obama came to speak to the people of Boston in response to the Marathon bombing. Honored to be included in this historic event, she wrote in her blog:

*I have had many moments when I've been proud to be part of this great, historic city, where, as Governor Patrick said, "Massachusetts invented America." I was proud at the founding rally of GBIO and at when the Red Sox won the World Series. On Monday afternoon, when Brian and I sat in the right field seats at Fenway Park enjoying an exciting Red Sox game, I turned to him and said, 'I'm so glad we live in Boston.'*

*But I have never felt such pride as today, seeing so many different people coming together and hearing our president describe the many accomplishments of our city, its rich medical and intellectual and artistic resources, and the indomitable yet compassionate spirit of the residents. Indeed, I will always "love that dirty water," and proudly sing "Boston, you're my home."*

## **Boston is Home**

Rabbi Penzner instilled in her congregation a sense of belonging and responsibility to the city of Boston. The Jews of West Roxbury had experienced vandalism and acts of antisemitism in past years in this white Irish-Catholic enclave. Rabbi Penzner stepped up early on to become acquainted with the community. In the fall of her second year at HBT, she stood with a Black family after an arsonist set their new home in West Roxbury on fire. Over the years, she has observed how the neighborhood has changed, politically and demographically.

Prior to 1995, HBT participated in an annual interfaith Thanksgiving Service sponsored by local churches. Rabbi Penzner joined the group of Protestant clergy every year as the location rotated to include HBT as well as Theodore Parker Church, Emmanuel Episcopal, Stratford Street United, and the Arabic Evangelical Baptist Church. In the past the Catholic Churches had not been approached to participate. But times changed, as the service led to more interfaith dialogue among the clergy.

After 9/11, the clergy group invited the Catholic parishes to a special Thanksgiving service of unity. From 2001 on, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews gathered annually for Thanksgiving. Rabbi Penzner continued to maintain relationships with local clergy, though many moved on over the years. By 2023 the rabbi was the most senior clergy member in the Parkway.

Rabbi Penzner increased her participation further in city-wide events after she and Brian moved from Newton to West Roxbury in 2012. Several City Councilors have invited her to give invocations at City Council meetings and Mayor Menino asked her to be the first rabbi to give the invocation at his final State of the City address. In 2015, she delivered the invocation for the opening of the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the U.S. Senate in Boston, and she has offered a benediction at the opening of the state legislature twice.

## **TIKKUN OLAM: SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Rabbi Penzner's life-long social justice work has deep roots in her family's progressive politics. Her parents' idealism led them to eschew Democratic candidates for president in favor of socialists such as Norman Thomas and Henry Wallace. A member of the Communist Party of America before he was married, her father Jerry Penzner was a devoted civil rights advocate who read African-American literature while serving on a Navy aircraft carrier in the Pacific during World War II. Barbara's brother Michael, eight years her senior, who had a low lottery number in the Vietnam draft, made the courageous decision to apply for conscientious objector status. The draft board in Johnson County Kansas was known to be one of the most difficult places to be granted CO status. Yet with the support of the family's rabbi, Morris B. Margolies, who had

marched in Selma and preached against the Vietnam War, Michael succeeded. Barbara has always admired Michael's integrity and commitment to social justice and to Judaism. "In our family, you gave your life for a larger purpose," Barbara says.

For Barbara, the connection to the spiritual and the holy encompasses working for equity and justice in their daily lives. She observes,

*The prophet Micah teaches, Do justice, act with love, walk humbly with ..(your God, your community, the cosmos, your highest principles. (my translation of Micah 6:8) Our world needs all four of those touchstones. This verse gives direction to my life. Spiritual practice leads to opening the heart. And an open heart feels the pain of others. It is in that moment that we seek to do justice.*

*Spirituality sustains our work to do justice, and social justice fulfills the purpose of walking humbly. One leads to the other, one supports the other, one fulfills the other.*

*Do what you can every day to do justice, to act with love and to walk humbly with... your principles, your community, the cosmos. One cannot walk humbly alone.*

Tikkun Olam has been an important pillar of congregational life since the rabbi arrived, beginning with the congregation's role in the founding of GBIO. Congregants continue to engage in rallies, advocacy, service projects, and protests. The congregation contributes monthly to Family Table, collects food on Yom Kippur for Boston Medical Center's Grow Clinic, and is represented by a dedicated group of walkers for the Mother's Day Walk for Peace in Dorchester in partnership with Louis D. Brown Peace Institute.

In recent years, the board voted for HBT to join a local sanctuary network, members have participated in postcard campaigns to register voters in other states, supported reproductive rights, and adopted an Afghan refugee family in partnership with Congregation Dorshei Tzedek. In 2022, the congregation joined a campaign for a moratorium on new women's prisons promoted by a local Boston group – Families for Justice as Healing.

As the rabbi wrote in an online article for eJewish Philanthropy:

*Tikkun olam efforts have been embraced by newly arrived and veteran members alike, stepping up to work within our congregation on ending racism, lobbying for criminal justice reform, accompanying ICE detainees, supporting*

*transgender rights, and creating a welcoming space for people with physical and mental disabilities, among a variety of pressing issues. Small as we are, we have made a name for ourselves in the Boston Jewish community as a congregation committed to social justice.*

Examples of the projects Rabbi Penzner has initiated as HBT's rabbi include:

### **Repairing Houses in Limestone, Maine, and New Orleans**

In the summer of 2005, Barbara used three months of sabbatical to help found The Tikkun Olam Family Work Project (later nicknamed Jews with Hammers – JWH). Steve August had been looking for a social justice project with his teenage son, and together they organized a group of families that included Shelley Stevens and David Tabachnik, and their sons Sam and Nathaniel. A small group of volunteers traveled to Cumberland, Maryland, a once-prosperous town on the Potomac River, for a week repairing homes alongside prison inmates who were preparing for parole. It was a rustic environment. The group slept on army cots in a church, took showers at the local Y, and ate meals at the hospital.

Sadly, the Interfaith Coalition that ran the program in Cumberland closed the project later that year. Eager to continue a similar summer project, Steve discovered a Methodist Church in Limestone, Maine. Pastor Ellen and her husband Malcolm hosted mission groups to do repair work in one of the poorest counties in Northernmost Maine. The Tikkun Olam Family Work Project sought to attract people from all over Boston with fliers that read:

*The Tikkun Olam Family Work Project is comprised of adult and youth volunteers from New England. Our group from Greater Boston organizes its own summer trips to remote, underfunded communities to work on housing, repair, and construction projects for individuals in need. We are always in search of new volunteers, and all are welcome regardless of geography or affiliation. Whether you are a maven with tools and building projects or a novice, you can make a difference.*

Limestone was a bucolic seven-hour drive from Boston, and participating families generously gave up a week of their vacation fixing and renovating homes. From Monday through Friday, volunteers spent the day insulating walls, installing windows, painting, and fixing roofs. Rabbi Penzner recalls: “Our teens were learning side-by-side with their parents and that gave them a feeling of empowerment. Kids had a say in the work we did. We learned what it meant to be poor and that had a big impact on us.”

Over the years, many HBT families brought their teens to Limestone, building relationships with the church members, homeowners, and befriending the one Jewish family in the town. The trip was enhanced by blueberry picking and the tasty treats that church members brought to the worksite every day. When the HBT volunteers returned, stories about Limestone always found their way into a High Holy Day sermon about service and activism.

In February 2009, HBT and Dorshei Tzedek families traveled to New Orleans to assist in post-Katrina cleanup. The group spent a week learning about New Orleans and working on several community projects. Bruce Mallory's math skills came in handy as the group worked to build a large shed for the local church where the synagogue group stayed. Taking up bunkbeds in yet another church basement, the group toured the Lower Ninth Ward, was hosted by two local synagogues for meals, and enjoyed Mardi Gras parades. That year's Purim theme at HBT was Mardi Gras, with the rabbi distributing beads to everyone.

### **Human Rights Shabbat**

Beginning in 2008, T'ruah: the Rabbinic Voice for Human Rights, began to sponsor Human Rights Shabbat, held on the nearest Shabbat before International Human Rights Day, December 10. HBT was among the first congregations in T'ruah's campaign to insert Human Rights Shabbat into the liturgical calendar, along with the Shabbat closest to Martin Luther King Jr's birthday. Speakers were invited to teach about issues including the plight of refugees, mass incarceration, Islamophobia, and racism. One year, HBT highlighted the activism of three generations of the Messinger family: grandmother Ruth, mom Miriam, and daughter Amani Hayes-Messinger, in a compelling conversation about their different approaches to activism.

HBT member Susannah Sirkin, a longtime human rights defender with Physicians for Human Rights, led the way to create a new haftarah for Human Rights Shabbat. Following the Torah reading, individual members stood to read aloud in turn one article of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Each voice dramatically presented a personal connection to activism, whether health care or law or the arts or medicine. That haftarah has been published in "Prophetic Voices," the CCAR haftarah compendium of new and alternative haftarot, expanding the practice of reading the Declaration as an annual Shabbat observance.

The December observance of Human Rights Shabbat was strengthened by a generous donation in memory of social justice activist Larry M. Diamond, who died in 2013. A year later, thanks to Larry's partner Linda Chernick, her brother and Larry's brothers, the Larry M. Diamond Human Rights Shabbaton has become a weekend with a



congregational meal featuring a major speaker. Additionally, the temple honors a young person with the Larry M. Diamond Tikun Olam Youth award. While the award was suspended during the pandemic, the congregation continued to celebrate Human Rights Shabbat on Zoom, bringing in speakers from as far as Guatemala and Israel and as close as Vermont.

### **Advocating for the Hyatt 100**

In August 2009, just before the Jewish New Year, 98 housekeepers at the three Hyatt hotels in the Boston area, mostly women and almost all immigrants, were told to empty their lockers. Without notice, workers who had been with the hotels for more than twenty years were replaced by subcontractors who they unknowingly agreed to train as “vacation substitutes.” The housekeepers, who were not unionized, reached out to Boston’s Local 26 UNITE/HERE for assistance in mobilizing support for their plight. They came to be known as the Hyatt 100.

Then-Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick issued a statement in September that no government events would take place at Hyatt hotels and state employees would not stay at the hotels while traveling on state business. As a leader in the New England Jewish Labor Committee, Rabbi Penzner was moved by the governor's dictum and the season of repentance to raise awareness in the Jewish community. She spearheaded a petition signed by over 200 rabbis and cantors in Massachusetts, protesting the move by Hyatt. The clergy resolved not to hold celebrations or meetings at the three local Hyatt hotels. In the process they succeeded in persuading the Association of Jewish Chaplains to cancel their convention at a Boston Hyatt hotel.

Rabbi Penzner followed up and brought the petition to Hyatt Corporate Headquarters in Chicago in December, driving home the message that many in the Jewish community were boycotting the chain. There she learned that Hyatt was hoping to use Boston as an example to end union contracts and transfer all housekeeping duties to subcontractors.

Six months later the rabbi was back in Chicago, leading a clergy protest at the Hyatt shareholders’ meeting. While management snuck out the back door to avoid the clergy outside the ballroom, one vice president came out to meet the group. Rabbi Penzner memorably presented him with a slice of horseradish root, which she urged him to bite into, while all the other clergy followed suit. She explained that he too needed to taste the bitter herb of slavery from the Passover Seder.

Rabbi Penzner remained active with UNITE/HERE as the campaign grew into a global boycott of Hyatt Hotels and was the contact for Jewish leaders nationally who wanted to support the hotel boycott. The dispute was finally resolved in 2013, with 98

housekeepers splitting a million-dollar settlement that also required all new Hyatt hotels in Boston to be unionized.

As co-chair of the New England Jewish Labor Committee, Rabbi Penzner continued to protest and speak on behalf of hotel workers, janitors, nurses, and workers across Massachusetts. She traveled to Memphis in April 2018 on behalf of the JLC to lead a national Labor Seder following a workers' march that brought thousands of union workers to Memphis. The events marked the fiftieth anniversary of the "I Am a Man" march and the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Rabbi Penzner wrote to her congregation:

*My purpose is to charge us, authentically and fully as Jews, to answer Dr. King's resounding call. As in the past, we may not see official Jewish organizations answer that call. Our presence may still remain invisible to the African American community. In the long tradition of Kivie Kaplan and Julius Rosenwald, of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rabbi James Wax, of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, we need to be there. Like those bold leaders of the past, it is time for us to join the fight and to stand up for justice, regardless of our numbers, regardless of the risks, regardless of whether we get credit, and to commit ourselves to create that beloved community and to transform our nation, fulfilling Dr. King's dream.*

### **The Coalition of Immokalee Workers: Justice for-Farmworkers**

Having heard about Rabbi Penzner's leadership on behalf of the hotel housekeepers, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, CEO of Rabbis for Human Rights North America (now T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights), asked her to join the first T'ruah trip to Immokalee, Florida in September 2011. On that trip the group learned about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). T'ruah has been CIW's closest Jewish ally, bringing an awareness of the human rights abuses at the beginning of the food chain, where migrant workers pick the food eaten in American households.

Founded in 1993 as a work-based human rights organization, CIW fights against human trafficking and gender-based violence in the workplace. In 2011, CIW launched the Fair Food Program (FFP), a partnership among farmworkers, Florida tomato growers, and participating retail buyers. Retailers included Taco Bell and Subway, and later attracted Whole Foods and Walmart to abide by the program's Fair Food Code of Conduct. The code "covered all the protections for farmworkers in the Program – from wages and hours to freedom from retaliation to health and safety protections."

On Rosh Hashanah that year, Rabbi Penzner delivered a sermon, “On Power, Hope, and Change,” highlighting the invisible workers in hotels and in tomato fields.

*The central message of the Shema is to be an ed, to bear witness. The first word of Shema, ends with the silent letter, ayin. The last word of the shema, echad, ends with the powerful letter dalet. We could choose to be silent, like the ayin. Or we can choose to speak out, like the dalet. Together, the two letters form the word ed, which means witness.*

*By telling you these stories, I bear witness to the struggles of people on the lowest rungs of our economic ladder. And I am also bearing witness to the greatness of the human soul to link arms with others, to draw on the rich reservoirs of divine goodness and to create something from nothing, sustenance from poverty, strength from weakness, power from powerlessness.*

Following the 2011 trip to Florida, the temple community embraced the CIW Fair Food campaign. With the goal of persuading Trader Joe’s to sign on to the Fair Food Program, congregational members, from b’nai mitzvah students to individuals and families, joined actions in Brookline, Newton, and Needham to raise awareness of the source of TJ’s tomatoes. Within months, Trader Joe’s had signed on to the program. A few months later, Rabbis for Human Rights gave Rabbi Penzner their Rabbinic Human Rights award. HBT members nominated their rabbi for the honor. She made three additional visits to Immokalee as a leader in the interfaith Alliance for Fair Food.

Rabbi Penzner considers her work with the Immokalee farmworkers building upon the principle of *k’vod habriot*, forging human dignity through “uplifting people to keep fighting for their self-worth and human rights.”

### **Arrest at the U.S. Capitol on behalf of the Dreamers**

On February 1, 2018, Rabbi Penzner wrote in *The Forward*:

*Last week I joined 100 Jewish community leaders from around the country in the rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building. Organized by [Bend the Arc Jewish Action](#), we marched in together, many in Jewish ritual garb, sat down, and sang about building a world of compassion. When the U.S. Capitol police warned us that we were breaking the law and would be charged with obstruction and “incommoding,” we had a ready response. We sang “We Shall Not Be Moved.”*

Invited as a Jewish leader to join a peaceful protest at the Capitol to protect Dreamers, Rabbi Penzner described her experience of being arrested as “one of the most

empowering days of my life.” Leaders from across the Jewish spectrum, aged 18 to 78, chose to have their wrists zip-tied behind their backs as they were taken away to a frigid police garage, where they were held for several hours, men and women in separate areas. Recognizing that her arrest for civil disobedience paled in comparison to the risks that undocumented immigrants take every day, Rabbi Penzner asserted her belief that her presence in the Senate Rotunda represented the Jewish community as well as the DACA recipients, many of whom circled the group inside the Senate office building.

Standing with a marginalized group once again, Rabbi Penzner wrote:

*Wearing stickers that read “Jews for Dreamers,” we communicated to these brave immigrants that they are not alone. With tears in their eyes, and solidarity orange knit caps on their heads, they told us how isolated they felt because people in our country have told them they don’t belong here. Our action, our singing, our presence showed that we are with them.*

## **Support for Human Rights in the Global South**

Rabbi Penzner was selected to join the Rabbinic Global Justice Fellows program of the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) in 2018. Committing to learn about human rights work in the Global South, the Fellows traveled to Guatemala with Ruth Messinger and AJWS staff in early 2019.

The fellows met with Guatemalan human rights leaders to bear witness to the tragic consequences of Guatemala’s long civil war for the Guatemalan people. They were also exposed to the oppression of indigenous peoples throughout Central America and the painful role that the US government played in undermining democracy there. The Fellows came away with a mandate “to teach and raise awareness of human rights issues. We were also determined to lobby Congress and continue advocating for the human rights that AJWS highlights.”

In an opinion piece for AJWS, Rabbi Penzner wrote:

*Unbeknownst to most Americans, the democratic government of Guatemala is quickly becoming a dictatorship. As a result, more and more Guatemalans will make the painful choice to leave their homeland, taking their families on the dangerous journey through our southern border in hopes of finding a better life in the U.S.*

*Guatemala lives with the legacy of a 36-year-long internal armed conflict sparked by a U.S.-sponsored military coup in 1954. During the conflict, close to a million people were displaced from their homes, and 200,000 people were*

*murdered or “disappeared.” And since a peace agreement was reached in 1996, Guatemala has faced rampant corruption and impunity for elites, politicians, and perpetrators of war crimes.*

In a subsequent lobbying trip to Washington, DC, the AJWS Rabbinic Global Justice Fellows, met with Senators and Members of Congress, and staff at the State Department and USAID to discuss human rights in the Global South. She reported to her congregation:

*Telling stories from our recent trip to Guatemala, of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who are living in starvation, squalor, and fear of returning to their home country, and of the chilling effect of the U.S. Global Gag Rule [preventing any healthcare organization from providing, advocating for, or even mentioning, abortion] on the health of women and girls and LGBT folk across the world, we met with people who truly have the power to make a difference. It was an important lesson in the power and responsibility of individuals living in a democracy.*

The rabbi’s advocacy on behalf of immigrants, whether hotel housekeepers, farm workers, Dreamers, or migrants from Central America amplified the ongoing attention toward immigration justice that ignites temple members to this day.

## **AVODAH: WORSHIP**

Worship and ritual form the foundation of a synagogue. At Hillel B’nai Torah, Rabbi Penzner worked tirelessly to engage, teach, and model a life of ritual and worship for all. The purpose of every service the rabbi leads is to engage everyone as an active participant. Although she brings her musical voice to the prayer experience, she acts as a song leader rather than a performer. Students celebrating their b-mitzvah are treated as members of the community and leaders in the art of prayer. HBT services depend on the active engagement of those in attendance in whatever capacity they wish to participate. The synagogue is blessed to have leaders who can speak, read Torah, lead prayers, and teach. The community has grown spiritually because of individuals seeking to develop those worship-based skills.

Nowhere is that level of congregational participation more apparent than on the High Holy Days, in Hebrew *Yamim Nora'im*, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Over the years more and more individuals have stepped up to give a Personal Offering on Yom Kippur, to provide kavvanot to the different services while the rabbi was serving as chazzan (cantor), to chant Torah and haftarah, sound the shofar from around the sanctuary, read poetic offerings from the supplement that the rabbi created, to add

new/old prayers reflecting a multi-cultural range of Jewish traditional prayers and melodies, to bring musical offerings from the HBT “House Band,” and to step up for innumerable honors. A great many HBT members have deepened their understanding of the holiday themes and liturgy, and even developed practices to prepare themselves in the month of Elul leading up to Rosh Hashanah. The High Holy Days are joyous, meaningful, accessible on many levels, and most of all, an opportunity to strengthen our individual spirituality as well as community bonds. Moreover, HBT services provide spiritual sustenance and community building on Shabbat and holidays all year long, albeit in more intimate settings.

The holidays of Simchat Torah and Purim stand out as congregation-wide celebrations that break the mold that many of us think represents synagogue services. Simchat Torah has always included singing and dancing, as well as two unique rituals at HBT. We unroll the entire Torah scroll around the perimeter of the congregation. While adults and teens hold up the scroll, the rabbi walks along telling the story of Torah with younger children following behind. Afterward, we have encouraged families and individuals to bid on the pumpkins, gourds, and corncobs that serve as bimah decorations. With elements of fun and organized chaos, Simchat Torah is a highlight of the year.

Purim occupies congregants for weeks of preparation and celebration to fulfill the four mitzvot of Purim: *mishloach manot* (sending gifts of food to community members), *kriyat megillah* (reading the Megillah of Esther), *matanot le'evyonim* (gifts to the needy), and *se'udat Purim* (a joyful feast of food, drink, and fun). Chaverim School students prepare baskets with holiday cards that they distribute to seniors, new members, and others in the congregation in honor of Purim. Members dress up in costume for the reading of the Megillah according to a unique Purim theme announced each year. In many years, congregants or students rehearse a parody version of the Story of Esther that they perform when the Megillah is read. Our Purim Carnival brings together volunteers to run booths and children of all ages to play games and jump in the bouncy house—often in costume. HBT has been a longtime partner of and contributor to Boston's Yad Chessed, which distribute funds to the needy on Purim. HBT members have generously donated to Yad Chessed through this entire period. Purim also attracts new members, who discover a completely different experience of Jewish life at HBT while making new connections to temple members.

### **Spiritual Nourishment for a Rabbi and Her Congregation**

Since that pivotal moment under the tree at camp, Barbara knew there was more to prayer than rote recitation. As a congregational rabbi, she has brought a spiritual approach to every prayer, offering a *kavanah*, or intention, to create a unique gateway

into encountering Hebrew prayer. Throughout her rabbinate she has developed her participation in prayer to transcend the role of leader. In every service – virtual or in-person – she brings her authentic experience in joy and gratitude or grief and sorrow, modeling a spiritual experience for everyone.

In a desire to explore her spiritual life, Rabbi Penzner accepted the invitation in 2005 from spiritual director Dr. Roslyn Weiner to join a spiritual direction group with three other women rabbis, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Renewal. Bringing very different perspectives on God to their monthly sessions, the rabbis continued to meet regularly for eight years under Roz's guidance. They came to understand a variety of approaches to the divine and formed warm and lasting friendships. Since the group disbanded, Rabbi Penzner has continued to meet with Roz privately: "Roz has helped me find God more than I could imagine and given me the tools to be able to have a personal relationship with a God who isn't a person. She taught me the distinction between caring for and caring about family members who were going through serious illnesses. That distinction enables you to care without feeling weighed down."

Roz describes her spiritual progress with Barbara as having no agenda. "I listen deeply as Barbara seeks to be increasingly aware of the sacred dimensions of everyday life. She is free to bring any topic to our attention and we plumb it for its meaning or the possibility of God's presence within. Sometimes I ask questions; sometimes I reflect what I'm hearing; occasionally I might cautiously offer a suggestion as to a Jewish teaching or practice that pertains to what Barbara is voicing. Together we hopefully co-create a sacred space in which we are both attentive to God's presence, however we name God, which might not be the same. It is a privilege to acknowledge Barbara at this liminal moment in her life. I value her as a rabbi and a spiritual friend and companion."

In 2009, Barbara's friend and colleague, Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg, who describes Barbara as a "star," invited her to participate in an 18-month program sponsored by the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS). IJS was founded in 1999 with the mission of "pioneering the development and teaching of Jewish spiritual practices that are grounded in mindfulness, draw upon the deepest wells of Jewish wisdom, and enable people to live and lead with clarity, resilience, and a sense of sacred purpose."

Rabbi Penzner considered IJS a unique opportunity to deepen her connection to Hasidic texts, practice self-care, and nourish her congregation. The program included four four-day retreats on both coasts with lay people and rabbis of diverse denominations in attendance. Participants practice yoga, meditate, and study sacred texts on the retreats and commit to continue daily practice in the months between. Practicing in silence for the first hours of the day, the rabbi recalls it was an optimal time to foster personal spiritual connections.

Rabbi Weinberg observes, "Given Barbara's intellectual and spiritual depth, IJS was an important part in her learning and career." Rabbi Penzner found the IJS experience lifechanging as she focused on her relationship to prayer and how she led services. "I had more flexibility about prayer. Prayer doesn't speak to most people. I've become more creative about focusing on certain prayers. I delve into these prayers bearing in mind not to cram in everything."

Part of the IJS curriculum calls for people to pair up with a *chevruta* or study partners. Rabbi Penzner has been studying with two partners, Rabbi Rena Blumenthal and Rabbi Debra Rappaport, weekly for over ten years. Their conversations and study of Hasidic texts, poetry, and sacred works have been essential to her spiritual life. "IJS changed the way I experienced spirituality. My mind settled and I became a more attentive listener because I was more in touch with compassion and empathy. I also became more physical, opening up to movement and yoga as a form of spirituality."

### **Holy Connections**

Over the years, Rabbi Penzner has further personalized her connections to the holy. She has devoted her rabbinate to finding how the holiness of the ordinary magnifies that of the extraordinary. In her last Yom Kippur sermon in 2022 she shared personal moments of holiness in her life as she:

*... found holy connections in the ordinary and the extraordinary, as an individual and in community, sometimes in Jewish times and places and sometimes elsewhere: whether*

*standing by the unceasing majestic flow of Niagara Falls or at the rim of the Grand Canyon, conscious of the magnificence of this world as it is and of the short time and miniscule impact of my own existence here.*

*or*

*leading friends in a mixed group one Shavuot morning singing Hallel at the kotel [Western Wall in Jerusalem], near the back of the plaza, finding my own space and my own way to pray in this ancient site that I found so difficult because men and women were separated, yet feeling an unspoken connection to the words, the melodies, the tallit that covers me, and to all the people praying there and all those who have prayed there for generations.*

*or*

*holding the joy of a grandchild and the sorrow of my sister dying of cancer, in the very same moment.*



*In these encounters I have been rewarded by unexpected insights that broaden my perspective. I seek the divine through rituals, meditation, prayer, and Torah study, all of which help me get unstuck, to see from different angles, and to connect to deeper meaning and broader horizons. What I find comes from a place beyond: beyond my own opinions, beyond my own rational yet limited mind, beyond my ego. When I cry out in prayer or listen for wisdom in Torah study, I find an inner voice urging me to stretch and to be my best, a force that pushes all of humanity toward justice, a loving presence that encourages us to keep striving in hope and not to give in to habit or to succumb to despair.*

*As Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, “There is a transcendent meaning to the universe independent of our comprehension.”*

## **A New Sanctuary**

Understanding how the space where a community gathers can shape the prayer experience, Rabbi Penzner had been thinking for years about improving HBT's sanctuary environment. The long journey to a newly renovated sanctuary had been a dream since the Avodah Committee first raised the question of removing the pews in 1998. Initially all services were held in the large dark sanctuary where the pews were bolted to the floor. Over time most services, including daily, Shabbat and holidays, migrated to the chapel, which provided a sense of intimacy, and allowed congregants to watch the trees bloom or a visiting cardinal perch outside the window. Meanwhile, the sanctuary remained a place of missed opportunity.

The first step toward bringing the sanctuary into the 21<sup>st</sup> century was enabled by Dianne Heitin, who wanted to make a gift to the synagogue to honor her becoming an adult bat mitzvah. With the help of artist Hilary Kassler and assistance from Amy Lassman of Adar Design, a new *parochet* replaced the dark, aging velvet curtain that covered the ark. The curtain's design incorporates a Hebrew verse (Proverbs 3:17) sung at the end of the Torah service, proclaiming the importance of Torah, “All of Its Paths Lead to Peace.”

With the need for more space for school and adult programming, Rabbi Penzner imagined a more accessible sanctuary filled with activity, if only the pews could be removed and replaced with chairs. Following the dreams of the Avodah Committee, she conveyed the idea of moving chairs into different configurations for various services. She shared her vision with the congregation in 2018. Thanks to the leadership of Raquel Rosenblatt and Mark Dinaburg, a team of congregants assiduously developed a plan for renovating the sanctuary. The fundraising campaign, named *Shevet Achim Gam Yachad*, taken from Psalm 133 and often sung as an anthem for dwelling together in peace, was repurposed as “let's all sit together in comfort.” The phrase poetically evoked

an image of the HBT congregation gathering in a more welcoming space for prayer, reflection, and celebration.

With a very successful fundraising effort, renovations began in 2020. The pandemic lockdown that closed the synagogue doors brought an unanticipated blessing – the summer of 2020 was an opportune time for work to take place in the empty building. This new energy excited the membership and filled the space. The old pews were given new life when an Evangelical Dominican church, Iglesia de Luz y Vida, in Lynn, approached. HBT to take all the pews to the building they were renovating. Coincidentally, the church was renovating a former synagogue for its new church space.

As the church workers moved out the pews and loaded them into a truck, the rabbi thanked them for giving the benches new life. She sent the church group off with a blessing for peace and protection from all harm. "Our synagogue is your synagogue, your church is our church," said Rabbi Penzner. "*Somos hermanas y hermanos – we are sisters and brothers.*" Then she sang the late singer-songwriter Debbie Friedman's iconic rendition of *Tefillat Haderech* (Prayer for the Journey) to the Lynn church members. Removing the pews offered another holy connection for temple members. "It was very moving and spiritual to witness the church members receiving this gift from our past," Rabbi Penzner says. She looks forward to visiting with congregants to see the pews in their new home.

Work on the sanctuary continued all summer with asbestos removal, a new paint job, carpeting, and new lighting, followed by the momentous arrival of the new chairs. A mobile reading table was moved from the chapel to the center of the sanctuary to bring the rabbi down from the bimah and create complete access to the Torah. As congregants returned over the next year, they were in awe of the infusion of light and beauty into the space.

At Rosh Hashanah 2021, when the full congregation could return, HBT dedicated its newly renovated sanctuary, which Rabbi Penzner calls her "crown jewel," in a joyous ceremony, with singing and recognitions culminating in unveiling the plaque listing all the donors.

Throughout the pandemic, the congregation remained steadfast in providing services, holiday programs, and Chaverim School classes on Zoom. Students prepared for b'nai mitzvah by meeting with Rabbi Barbara in her backyard when the weather permitted. Those outdoor meetings were a special time for students and parents to discuss the Torah with her. On Simchat Torah, HBT members danced with the Torah scrolls in the back parking lot. New members joined from near and far, including at least one individual who converted to Judaism during the pandemic. The renewal of the

sanctuary space, filled with light and life, played an important role in sustaining the congregation during that challenging time.

### **It Has Been the Greatest Privilege of My Life to be Your Rabbi**

As Rabbi Barbara Penzner reflects on her 28 years as Temple Hillel B'nai Torah's rabbi, she feels an overwhelming sense of gratitude to her congregation for the remarkable community they have built together. In her Yom Kippur sermon, she shared her reflections as she prepared to step down for a final time from HBT's *bima* as the temple's rabbi:

*I was all of 22 when I first recognized that becoming a rabbi was my reason for being here, the place I could dedicate my own gifts, the one true path I wanted and needed to follow. Just as many of us have no clue what our marriage will look like decades later, I had no concept of where this path might take me. I have come to appreciate just how important it was in my life to grow up in a vibrant synagogue that nurtured my heart and mind, a place where I was known and influenced by caring adults, a refuge where I felt safe to be myself. That is the kind of holy community I have tried to recreate here at Hillel B'nai Torah.*

*It has been the greatest privilege of my life to be your rabbi. I am grateful every day for the many blessings of these past 28 years entering into your homes and hearts, rejoicing with you in your celebrations, grieving with you in your sorrows, and, most amazingly, bearing witness to the many transformations that shape each of us through a lifetime.*

*I am grateful for the unending opportunities to step outside of the mundane, to peek under the surface of the words, and to find the soul just underneath, continually drawn toward seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary.*

### **Rabbi Penzner's Legacy**

In an interview for the Jewish Women's Archive in 2014, Rabbi Penzner shared her hope of how she wished to be remembered.

*There are two things I'd like to be remembered for. I want to be remembered for kindness, and I want to be remembered for the relationships I've had with people and the ways that I've helped guide them through life's journey. I also want to be remembered for being a spokesperson for those who have suffered injustice and as someone who has stood up to change the structures of our*

*world to bring more kindness, justice, and love into the relationships that we build in our world. While we work for tzedakah and we work to support people who are in need, we also have to remember to advocate for the bigger changes that really need to be made, and I hope to be able to say that I've contributed to that.*

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With deep appreciation to all of those who served our community as temple presidents from 1995-2023. You have each contributed more than we could have asked for and have left our congregation stronger and committed to Jewish values that will endure into the future.

Lenny Markowitz 1995-1996  
John Cotton z"l 1996-1999  
Ashley Adams 1999-2002  
Ruth Lederman 2002-2005  
Robin Fox 2005-2008  
David Brenner 2008-2011  
Shelley Stevens 2011-2013  
Craig Schneider 2013-2015  
Jan Snitzer and Jean Weinberg 2013-2017  
Judith Levine 2017-2019  
Jocelyn Gordon 2019-2021  
Raquel Rosenblatt 2021-2024

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And with love and gratitude for the dedicated team at HBT who have worked together to create and nurture this sacred community. Each of you have gone above and beyond the expectations of an employee. You have all served this community as a caring and reliable team:

Laurie Spackman, Bookkeeper since 2002  
Socrates Moreno Guzman, Facilities Manager since 2005  
Benita Block, Director of Administration and Communications since 2008  
Hillary Pinsker Engler, Education Director since 2011

In loving memory of HBT members who died between 1995-2023  
many of whom Rabbi Penzner accompanied to their final resting place.

Saralee Rosenkrantz 2023  
Shirley Goldberg 2022  
Libby Robinson 2020  
Ruth Kaufman 2019  
Geraldine Isaacson 2019  
Hyme Hipsman 2018  
Bob Dorfman 2018  
Marv Rosenkrantz 2018  
Steve Levine 2018  
Roz Scott 2017  
Whitey Cohen 2017  
Freda Wald 2016  
Harvey Towers 2015  
Toby Gutwill 2015  
Sam Isaacson 2015  
Etta Wolfe 2014  
Janice Bernstein 2014  
Ruth Polishook 2014  
Nancy Gadon 2013  
Larry M Diamond 2013  
Eileen Darman 2013  
Roz Mainelli 2013  
Martha Brier 2013  
Nate Segal 2013  
Ruth Rotman 2012  
Jim Goldberg 2011  
Harold Gordon 2011  
Anita Pugatch 2011  
Esther Goldstein 2010  
John Cotton 2009  
Jimmy Dorfman 2009  
Esther Goldman 2008  
Esther Katz 2008  
Maurice Pugatch 2008  
Julia Segel 2008  
Hilda Appel 2008  
Esther Gordon 2008  
Arthur Katz 2007  
Joe Patz 2007  
Zelda Froomer 2007  
Robert Levine 2006

Bernice Kunian 2006  
Jean Towers 2006  
Sumner Bernstein 2006  
Joe Robinson 2006  
Harvey Levine 2005  
Allen Worters 2005  
Mark Green 2005  
Harry Douglas 2005  
Esther Alpert 2004  
Dave Schraft 2004  
Marietta Finn 2004  
Harry Douglas 2005  
Esther Alpert 2004  
Dave Schraft 2004  
Honey Levitt 2003  
Maurice Rotman 2003  
Leon Freed 2002  
Lillian Douglass 2002  
Elaine Missel 2001  
Al Knopf 2001  
Nathan Goldstein 2001  
Muriel Winston 2001  
Felissa Gadon 2000  
Barney Levitt 2000  
Sam Miller 2000  
Lillian Freed 2000  
Arthur Sidney Goldberg 1999  
Mel Alpert 1999  
Ruth Provizer 1999  
Arthur Provizer 1998  
Eta Levine 1998  
Selma Miller 1998  
Martha Davis 1998  
Max Goren 1997  
Sarah Patz 1996  
Billy Golod 1996  
Julian Darman 1996  
Florence Cohen 1996  
Stella Schraft 1995  
Elinor Spector 1995

*May their memories be a blessing*