

# Beth Israel Congregation

291 Main Street/P.O. Box 1882

Waterville, ME 04903

(207) 872 - 7551

[bethisraelwaterville.org](http://bethisraelwaterville.org)

December 2018

## **Rabbi**

Rabbi Rachel Isaacs

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Raymond Krinsky

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## **Words of Torah from Rabbi Isaacs**

Is it better to do something half-hearted than to do nothing at all? This question is raised in response to the question of Reuben in this week's Torah portion. When Joseph's brothers want to kill him, it is Reuben who convinces them to simply throw him in a pit and sell him to a caravan. He does not return Joseph home to safety or tell his father, Jacob, the truth about what happened to his beloved son. Rather, he does just enough to stem his brothers' hatred, and keeps a horrendous secret for years.

Rabbi Shai Held discusses the approaches of two rabbinic commentators on Reuben's actions. Rabbi Isaac b. Marion attributes Reuben's half-heartedness to a lack of faith. If he truly believed that God was watching every decision he made -- at every moment -- then he would not have taken a half-measure on such a serious affair. If he fully believed that the ultimate Creator and Judge was watching him at every moment, he would not settle for the barely passing moral grade, but rather would exert himself to honor and obey the Ultimate Instructor. Rabbi Chaim Zatichick, Held teaches, claims that Reuben's mediocre behavior is due to a lack of faith in himself. Held explains, "We become discouraged and demoralized far too quickly, he tells us, and we thus succumb to exhaustion and lethargy. Our problem, in other words, is that we 'lack faith in, and lack consciousness of, the full range of [our] currently latent, hidden capacities.'"

There is a connection between exemplary work and faith -- both faith in God and one's own abilities. According to the tradition, knowing and believing that God is watching us should not be a source of anxiety or fear, but rather of joy. When we can live with the comfort and security of God's presence and recognition in our lives, we can act with joy and a full heart.

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It is for that reason that serving God with joy is the highest form of service in our tradition. When we believe in ourselves, we don't sell ourselves short before we begin an mitzvah. We can see what full and total success looks like, and that is the first step to manifesting our best selves, and achieving what is required of us on earth.

I will be starting a two month sabbatical for January and February this year. Instead of taking a full six-month sabbatical, I have negotiated with the board for two months off during these two months. During these two months, I will be travelling to Israel, connecting with colleagues and rabbinical community, and committing myself to a set schedule of prayer and study. Faith takes work, quiet, and inspiration. As I continue in my work for this community in my eighth year as rabbi, I want to ensure that I am doing mitzvahs with a full heart and full confidence in what we can do as a community. This time will strengthen the bonds of my faith, and I look forward to returning in March recharged and reoriented toward success, joy, and commitment.

*Rabbi Isaacs will be in Israel December 15-January 15th, and in New York and Florida the last week of January. If rabbinic assistance is necessary while Rabbi is in Israel, please contact Rabbi David Freidenreich (dfreiden@colby.edu) or Rabbi Erica Asch (elsasch@colby.edu). Rabbi will be available for congregant funerals for the rest of her sabbatical. She can be contacted by phone or email as usual. She will not be leading services or teaching classes until March.*

## **WE REMEMBER**

### **The Yahrzeits for the month of December 2018 (23 Kislev - 23 Tevet):**

Esther P. Paikowsky  
Maurice Aronson  
Gisele Baroukel Miller  
Pauline Field Romanow  
Meyer Rosenthal  
Dorothy "Bibby" (Levine) Alford  
Esther Elkin  
Hershel Pearlberg  
Arthur B. Levine  
Harry Geller  
Rose Saperstein  
Barnet Jolowitz  
Anna Riva Shapiro  
George H. Wolman  
Morris Weiner  
Manya Russakoff  
Harriet Post  
George Chesner  
Ada Levine  
Martin S. Plavin  
Samuel G. Wein  
Jeffrey M. Coleman  
Philip Barron

## **May Their Memories Be For a Blessing**

### **MEMORIAL PLAQUES**

To purchase a Yahrzeit plaque please contact Rabbi Isaacs or Tiffany Lopes  
\$200 members/\$400 non-members

### **CALL FOR YAHRZEITS**

If you wish to have your loved ones' Yahrzeit observed during services, please  
e-mail Rabbi Isaacs.

### **Simchas and Updates**

Have a simcha you'd like to see printed in the Beth Israel monthly  
newsletter? Email

melanieaweiss@gmail.com by December 23.

## Upcoming Services & Synagogue Events

**Kabbalat Shabbat Potluck and Services:** December 7, 6pm, Beth Israel. Welcome in Shabbat with your Beth Israel community, and bring a dairy dish to share. Enjoy this chance to meet Benjy Forester, a rabbinical student and Center for Small Town Jewish Life rabbinic fellow.

### We're updating our misheberach list for Beth Israel.

Please share names using our online form, which you can find here:

<https://is.gd/0RXOde>

## Classes at Beth Israel

### Maine Jewish Youth Connection:

The second of four events for Jewish teens from across the state! This time, it's **December 2, 5-7:30, at Beth Israel!** Special guest Daniel Heinrich will teach us to cook a traditional Moroccan dish. Register before you come!

### Torah on Tap: Jewish Trivia Night!

Wednesday, December 5, 6pm at Mainely Brews. Come test your knowledge with great company and local brews and food!

### Hebrew School and Hebrew High:

Thursdays, December 6 and 13. Hebrew school, 3-5pm; Hebrew high, 5:30 - 6:30pm, both at Beth Israel. Students will need their Hebrew notebooks and something to write with.

## The Beth Israel Hanukkah Party!

Sunday, December 9, 4-7pm

Games \* Latkes \* Community

**Invite your friends, your family, your neighbors, to share in our celebration of light in the darkness and unexpected miracle.**

We need latke brigade members! Join us any time in the afternoon for latke-making and party set up. Can't join beforehand but want to help? We'll need many hands on deck for clean up, too!

## **Save the Date -- Community Conversations!**

Sunday, Jan. 27, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**\*Community Conversations:  
What is the role of the American family today?"**

At the Chace Community Center

### **How can I help with the Hanukkah party?**

- 1) Join the latke brigade!! We'll be frying latkes from 12:30-3 pm on Sunday 12/9 at Beth Israel
- 2) Set up decorations! All decorations are in the synagogue library, and we can open the synagogue on Sunday morning for set up!
- 3) Call the local newspaper for press coverage of our party!
- 4) Make goody bags for kids!
- 5) Bring a Hanukkah playlist and speakers!
- 6) Bring a soup, salad, and/or bread for a light afternoon meal!  
(all vegetarian)
- 7) Bring baked goods or fruit
- 8) Help clean up! 7:30-8:30 pm
- 9) Take out trash at the end of the night
- 10) Bring friends and neighbors to celebrate with us!