

A Message from the Rabbi

Dear Friends,

The first sentence of our synagogue's mission statement proclaims: "Congregation Beth Torah is a welcoming, Conservative synagogue community." Reading those words, I am proud to say that there are no qualifiers, no exceptions, no one either implicitly or explicitly excluded from that message. It is important to me that we walk the walk of welcoming, not just talk the talk. If anything accurately describes our larger Jewish community, as well as our Beth Torah community, it is diversity. In our congregational family we have different family profiles, a spectrum of religious observance and Jewish education, Jews by birth and Jews by choice, and a significant population of non-Jewish spouses and parents who also maintain meaningful connections to Beth Torah. These non-Jewish spouses and parents support their Jewish partners in their own Jewish lives, they bring their kids to religious school, and celebrate their Jewish milestones; they attend services on Shabbat and holidays, some with great frequency! These non-Jewish partners and parents give funds to support the synagogue, and several offer their talents and skills to help with our facility and programmatic efforts. In a very real way, Beth Torah is their community too.

This coming year Congregation Beth Torah is launching a coordinated effort to be more consciously aware of non-Jews in our midst. In fact, I am writing these words in the week following the Torah portion (Kedoshim) when the Israelites are commanded to treat non-Jews who dwell among them with respect and dignity. That is precisely the spirit of our new Keruv program. *Keruv* is the Hebrew word that means 'to bring one close.' Under the leadership of Liz Cox and Barry Newberg, a series of educational, social, and community building programs for interfaith couples and non-Jewish family members who are in the orbit of Congregation Beth Torah will be launched. In non-threatening, non-proselytizing ways, we hope to address the unique questions and journeys that interfaith families encounter. Some programs will take place in the synagogue, and others will be in more 'neutral' territory. I have made myself fully available as a resource and supporter for all of these endeavors.

A few years ago on Rosh Hashana, I gave a sermon about intermarriage in the Jewish community that I am still hearing about—undoubtedly because all of our families have been touched by intermarriage. In that sermon I said: "I know very well that not every non Jewish spouse will convert. And that's where our synagogue community must be a place that encourages people to make Jewish choices and raise Jewish families...I have seen it with my own family members who became active in synagogues that have helped them and encouraged them. If the only synagogues they encountered judged them, discouraged them, pushed them away, or closed the door on them they would most likely not have Jewish children today. Beth Torah has long had a reputation for being inclusive of interfaith families, and I am proud of that distinction. While this level of sensitivity is common in the Reform movement, Conservative Judaism has been slow to understand the needs of interfaith families. We at Beth Torah have been on the cutting edge of inclusion, and I believe we must continue in that mission."

This is the goal of our Keruv program...to bring people a little bit closer to the Beth Torah community. By bringing them from the periphery to the core of our concern and attention, I believe we will make our Jewish community and our synagogue stronger. By consciously offering programs and classes for our interfaith families,

[\(continued on page 5\)](#)



Adam Rubin

A Message from the Preschool

Rabbi Raskin shares a wonderful parshat written by Rabbi Zev Silver, Headmaster of Akiba.

"The Torah says that it is the responsibility of the Kohen to make sure that there is always a fire burning both day and night at the altar."

From a book titled "Toras Moshe," we learn that this fire can be thought of as an inner fire that burns within each of us. Each child has a spark within him/her. It is the duty of teachers and parents to ignite this spark each and every day! We have limited time with our children. As each child has a spark within him/her it is important never to give up on a child. We must work day and night to reach a child. If something does not work, we shouldn't give up. We must keep on trying until we find the spark that will ignite within our child.

That is the aim at Beth Torah Preschool & Kindergarten and we hope that our families and staff always work together for the children. It **does** take a village to raise a child! Our children are very special to all of us and we are always attempting to encourage and mentor each individual child.

At the time of this writing we are hard at work preparing our closing program. Thank you to all the staff and, of course, **Lisa Gerstenfeld** and **Haya Gross** for their hard work.



A big thank you to all our parents for their appreciation of our teachers.

Camp Chaverim begins with our Open House Monday, June 14 at 11:00 am. Our first day will be Tuesday, June 15. Camp is daily from 9 am – 2 pm. It is a fabulous program and includes swimming and tennis at Canyon Creek Country Club for the older campers.

A huge thank you to **Debra Pak** and **Liz Gluckman** and all of their committees for the wonderful programming for our Preschool.

Enjoy your time with your children and make memories.

Shalom, Esther

Rabbi's Message Continued



Rabbi Raskin with UNT Hillel past-president Laura Silvis and current president Aaron Stayman at the annual Israel Day on campus.

we send the unequivocal message that everyone is welcome in our synagogue community and that we are here to help strengthen family life. I am deeply grateful to our dedicated Keruv committee for forging ahead with these efforts. I look forward to a wonderful new chapter in Beth Torah's remarkable history of inclusion and sensitivity.

Biy'didut (In Friendship),
~ Rabbi Raskin