A Note from Rabbi Javier Cattapan

The Russian Connection

Let us pause for a moment and be honest: Who hasn’t been fascinated with Anastasia’s story? Not only the Disney movie and Broadway show based on a historical character, but the doubts about her fate. The public interest in the Grand Duchess has been based on the rumors of Anastasia’s possible escape that circulated after her death, fueled by the fact that the location of her burial was unknown during the decades of Communist rule. As a teenager, I too was intrigued by the possibility that the only living heir to the Russian throne could be living amongst us, in Buenos Aires. Indeed, I remember touring the main Russian Orthodox church in Buenos Aires and looking up at the ceiling of the main cupola and seeing the last Romanovs: the czar and the czarina, and all their angelic-looking children, except for Anastasia.

In recent months, my fascination with Anastasia Romanov grew as I learned of the lost connection between her family and Queen Esther found in some medieval manuscripts recently discovered among the holdings of the Cairo Geniza fragments kept at the library of the University of Cambridge, England. Unfortunately, Disney has chosen to ignore this connection adding, perhaps, yet another example of its founder’s anti-Semitic tendencies. We may never know…

But let us not digress. Historians teach that at the beginning of the 8th century, Jews from Iran and Byzantium settled among the Khazars in northern Daghestan, on the western shores of the Caspian Sea. We have evidence that some Khazars soon converted to Judaism. Finally, at the beginning of the 9th century, the king of Khazaria proclaimed Judaism the state religion. What the Geniza fragments show is that the rapid spread of Judaism in the area was due to the fact that the king had married a Jewish princess from Iran/Persia, who was said to be a direct descendant of Queen Esther. Khazaria eventually abandoned Judaism for Orthodox Christianity.

The Christian royal family of Khazaria lost its kingdom but continues to exist as an important noble house. More relevant to Purim is that the female side of the family continued practicing Judaism in secret. In the 15th century, a Khazar princess married into one of the most influential noble families in the German land, the House of Hesse (perhaps from the Hebrew chessed?). Czar Nicholas II’s wife, Alexandra, was born a German princess in Hesse, and thus she is directly connected to the Kazhars and Queen Esther. If all the Geniza findings are accurate, it seems to suggest that the czarina might have been a crypto-Jew and so were her daughters.

If this is correct, then when the Russian imperial dynasty came to an end in 1918 with the execution of the royal family, the Jewish people might have lost the last living connection to Queen Esther. My early fascination with Anastasia’s possible survival, although I did not know it at the time, was also my earliest contact with Judaism and the story of Purim. All speculation about Anastasia’s fate ended in 2001 when her body was identified. Thanks to Google I found out that her remains are yet to be buried, but when they are, we may have a place to venerate the last royal descendant of Queen Esther. If this is correct, then the 14th of Adar would become St. Anastasia’s Day.

My early fascination with Anastasia’s possible survival, although I did not know it at the time, was also my earliest contact with Judaism and the story of Purim. All speculation about Anastasia’s fate ended in 2001 when her body was identified. Thanks to Google I found out that her remains are yet to be buried, but when they are, we may have a place to venerate the last royal descendant of Queen Esther. If this is correct, then the 14th of Adar would become St. Anastasia’s Day. I guess we will have to wait and see. Happy Purim!
Our Pillars
We are a vibrant, modern Reform Jewish congregation where everyone matters.

Congregation Beth Torah:
Embraces Energizes
Illuminates Inspires
Responds Connects

OFFICERS
President ................................................... Scott Franklin
First Vice President ..................... Janice Schonwetter
Vice President .............................................. Boyd Bolter
Vice President ................................... Stephen Steigman
Secretary ........................................... Lauren Aaronson
Treasurer ................................................... Howard Pitler

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Jeff Antoniewicz
Dannie Bass
Miccole Bowen
Jo-Ann Harris
Amy Kane
Immediate Past President ....................... Barry Katz
BTTY President ................................................ Sam Fine

STAFF
Senior Rabbi ........................................... Rabbi Javier Cattapan
Founding Rabbi ......................... Rabbi Mark Levin, D.D., D.H.L.
Interim Director of Operations .................... Boyd Bolter
Director of Finance ................................. Tara Hyder
Director of Lifelong Learning .......................... Rabbi Monica Kleinman
Music Coordinator ............................... Lezlie Revelle Zucker
Office Manager ................................. Alyssa Schildhorn
Bookkeeper ........................................ Barbara Kitt
Administrative Assistant ....................... Sharon Altman
Tekiah Editor ......................................... Laura Bolter

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Phone: 913-498-2212
Fax: 913-498-1071
6100 West 127th Street
Overland Park, KS 66209
Email: info@beth-torah.org
Website: beth-torah.org
Facebook: facebook.com/CongregationBethTorah

Confronting the Horrors of the Holocaust at Terezin and Auschwitz-Birkenau

Please join us on SUNDAY, March 1st, from 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. for an adults-only presentation from Rabbi Cattapan, “Confronting the horrors of the Holocaust at Terezin and Auschwitz-Birkenau.” Rabbi Cattapan will share photos and speak to us about his recent trip to Eastern Europe. Information about a planned congregational trip to Eastern Europe will be shared. Refreshments will be served.

Support Youth Programming and the Weiner Religious School and treat yourself to a meal for four, delivered to your home, or picked up at Beth Torah on Sunday, April 19th.

Lox in a Box* or Salami

Here are the details:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Contents – meal for 4</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lox in a Box</td>
<td>6 oz. lox, 4 bagels, 8 oz. cream cheese, 1 each tomato, red onion, cucumber, sweets</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s Salami Mommy</td>
<td>1 lb. bullet salami, 1 small challah, mustard, 1 each tomato, red onion, cucumber, sweets</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All items are OU kosher.

Perfect for Sunday brunch or lunch. Send it as a gift for your friends in the community. Buy a couple of boxes and have a party.

Orders can be placed on the Beth Torah website until Wednesday, April 8th.

Orders will be delivered around the metro (from 75th Street to 179th Street), or can be picked up at Beth Torah on the morning of Sunday, April 19, 2020.
My perch as Board President provides me a unique congregational perspective. I’m not referring to any activities or interactions that would qualify for a Netflix episode. Instead, my focus is on individual efforts by our members, performed without fanfare, that result in major benefits to Beth Torah. I enjoy bringing these to your attention, because it speaks to the character of our synagogue.

The debate whether small children should be allowed in the sanctuary during services occurs in many religious institutions. In fact, it was a frequent topic with newspaper advice columnists “Ann Landers” and “Dear Abby.” You may be old enough to remember them. The pro position at that time was that nothing reminds us of the “Divine” as much as the innocent cry of a young child. The opposing view came from congregants who wanted to hear the sermon or choir without constant interruption.

Much of this discussion evaporated after new religious institutions were built with the addition of “crying rooms,” glassed sound-proof spaces located on the sides or in the back of the sanctuary. Beth Torah was constructed without these rooms, but baby-sitting was available for most services. We had the choice of having kids sit with us or play down the hall. For the record, the Franklin family explored alternatives for our two girls.

Since both kids wanted to sit next to their Mom, we were able to keep them separated. This diminished the physical disturbances, but the calm was often interrupted by barnyard animal sounds and the launch of personal insults that only our kids could hear, understand, and react to angrily.

After these incidents, we opted for “informed choice,” which seemed to be aligned with the Reform Movement’s philosophy on a variety of issues. Our youngest daughter chose to remain in baby-sitting, and the eldest usually sat with us. Neither child was better or worse for the wear. Both became bat mitzvah, confirmed, served as madrichot in the religious school, and enjoyed their Jewish education.

The arguments on both sides of this issue are numerous and cross religious lines. Sociologists, psychologists, theologians, and religious educators all bring nuanced views on the subjects, and the occasional black and white perspective also pokes through. I know this because of my exhaustive one-hour research on Google.

This debate at Beth Torah is moot. Barring special events, baby-sitting is no longer available due to realignment of resources and a 21st century child-inclusive philosophy. It is essential that our services honor those members who want their children to grow up experiencing the joy, traditions, and sounds of Shabbat. We also want our members who wish to focus totally on the service to do so without distraction. Are these expectations irreconcilable?

No. These dual outcomes can be realized at our congregation due to the creativity of our own Andrea Zwibelman.

Andrea wanted her granddaughter to experience services without growing restless, so she created a Shabbat Bag to entertain her. The results were favorable, so Andrea took the initiative to make some more bags to engage the youngest members of our congregation.

What are in these bags that keep the attention of very young children? Depending on age, the bags include puzzles, picture books, stickers, coloring books, small boards with “etch a sketch” capabilities, and mini teddy bears. These Shabbat bags are available at the book cart at the back of the sanctuary. I enjoyed a quick read of “Pout-Pout Fish,” who was able to cure his melancholy through the kindness of his friends.

Will every service now be free of disruptive children? Will the sounds of cell phones ringing, members chattering, or the occasional soft snore miraculously vanish from disruptive adults in attendance? No way. However, it’s now more likely that children can join their family with minimal disturbance, experience the joy of Beth Torah worship, and then continue this tradition as adults. Thank you, Andrea for generously sharing your creativity and expertise with Beth Torah.

---

**Thanks to Boyd Bolter**

On Thursday, March 5th, Boyd Bolter wraps up his tenure as Beth Torah’s Interim Director of Operations. We are extremely grateful to him for jumping into an important job on very short notice. Boyd was motivated by one thing—to help Beth Torah through an unexpected transition, which he has done with aplomb. The congregation and the rest of the staff have been well-served by his efforts and character.

Boyd exudes quiet competence, and is well-respected; his commitment to Beth Torah is enormous. His persona attracted members who wanted Boyd to succeed and made an extra effort to lend a hand. During Boyd’s tenure, big events and small groups all moved forward thanks to his organizational abilities and problem-solving skills.

Beth Torah cannot thank Boyd enough for his time and accomplishments as our Interim Director of Operations. We wish him well as he returns to his accounting career and his regular Beth Torah role as congregant and member of the Board.
It’s time to vote REFORM!

This is a critical time for our Reform Movement and an opportunity for you to have a significant role in strengthening the future of Reform Judaism in Israel. Your vote in the upcoming World Zionist Organizations can make a difference. Vote for our Reform Movement, our values, and our Israel.

Every five years the Jewish world conducts elections to the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO is the parliament of the Jewish people and a representative body in Israel to determine the allocation of funds by the Jewish Agency for Israel. Strength in this parliament translates into influence—and funding—on issues affecting Jews in Israel and worldwide. Your vote gives you a voice on issues like religious pluralism, peace, and democracy in Israel and strengthens our Reform Movement in Israel.

This election is an opportunity for Reform Jews in North America to stand with our Movement in Israel. In the 2015 World Zionist Congress elections, a significant turnout for the Reform slate translated into financial and political resources for the Reform Movement in Israel, allowing it to grow and flourish. We need your vote, and thousands of others, to secure this progress. Join us to move our agenda forward. Make your voice heard. Vote for the Reform slate in the World Zionist Congress elections.

What does this mean for the Reform Movement? Victory in the election will help support Reform Judaism in Israel to:

- Give Reform Jews a strong voice in critical decisions in Israel.
- Support the Israel Movement for Progressive and Reform Judaism with close to $5 million dollars in annual funding. Train Israel’s next generation of Reform rabbis. Support the important social justice and religious pluralism work of the Israel Religious Action Center. It is crucial that each and every adult member (18 or over by June 30, 2020) in our congregation participates. You can register online at www.ARZA.org. At this site, you can both register to vote and learn more about the election process and what is at stake.

To make it even easier to vote, you can come to CBT on Sunday morning, March 1st and March 8th. Howard Piter will be in the Ulam between 10 a.m.–12 p.m. with a computer and will step you through the entire process.

Make your voice heard.
VOTE REFORM.

National World War I Museum and Memorial Pick-A-Party

The golf classic is Beth Torah’s largest fundraiser.
WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Please contact Barry Katz at bkatz12306@gmail.com or 816-564-7095, or Sharon Altman at saltman@beth-torah.org or 913-530-2447, to see how you can help!
Thinking Methodically about Our Food

On February 9th the Weiner Religious School had a fantastic Tu B’shevat Family Day! Our families traveled from room to room learning about how Jewish tradition helps us think purposefully about how our food grows. We used the traditional brachot (blessings) to help guide our experience!

We all know *hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz*—“who brings forth bread from the earth.” Michael Fine and Jill Fine (no relation!) helped us look at different types of bread products and how they “come forth” from the earth so we can make them into their final product.

*Borei p’ri hagafen*—“creator of the fruit of the vine” was a fantastic experience with Miss Morgan! Learners made their own “vines” from which to string their hand-drawn fruits, as well as drawing their own magical plants. I even saw candy vines and pizza vines!

Mr. Zach helped us learn what grows on a tree and plant our own little trees! From mangoes to lemons and limes, learners and families tried a bit of each and planted seeds to take home. Let’s see how many mango trees we can find in the KC metro area in a few years!

Miss Norine and Morah Guillory led us in some fun with potatoes (*borei p’ri hadamah*—“from the earth”)! Learners decorated potatoes Mr.-Potato-Head-style, save for any hats. They dug out the top of the potato, planted some grass seeds, and will wait for the hair to grow. At least one was named for Patrick Mahomes!

Mrs. Ellenberg and Miss Stephanie taught us that not everything fits into these nice categories, like milk, eggs, and CANDY! There is a special blessing for these *she-hakol bara b’dvaro*—“everything created according to God’s word.” Between a cake-walk style game and tossing the ball around, everyone had a wonderful time.

Miss Elaine and Mrs. Hurst had one of the hardest tasks—*borei minei m’zonot*—“creator of all kinds of things.” This category is for food items like pizza, tacos, and salads that may contain a bunch of different items from each category above. Their “pizza project” was a blast - families were tasked with creating the silliest combination of ingredients on their pizza that would make it fall into this category! From a variety of fruits and vegetables to beverages, pastries, and more, they looked silly but not necessarily appetizing! Pictured at right is Nathan Bowen’s creation—Doritos, potatoes, and avocado—yum!

After visiting each station, our young friends took home a stress ball that looks like a fruit or vegetable - by that point in the day they knew how that plant grew, and that it doesn’t just come from the fridge at home! Thank you to all our teachers for creating a great family experience!

---

**Torah Portion**

March 6/7 | 11 Adar
Tetzaveh

March 13/14 | 18 Adar
Ki Tisa

March 20/21 | 25 Adar
Vayakhel/ Pekude

March 27/28 | 3 Nisan
Vayikra

---

Have you ever thought about reading from the Torah itself on Shabbat? Want to revisit a *parsha* you learned for Bar/ Bat Mitzvah? The signup genius has info about how to contact Rabbis Cattapan or Kleinman to help prepare:
signupgenius.com/go/10c0c4daeca-72babf94-torah1

---

**Upcoming Bat Mitzvah**

Randy and Sheila Wexler announce the Bat Mitzvah of their daughter, Ruby, at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, March 28th, at Congregation Beth Torah. Ruby is the granddaughter of Lou and Mary Ann Wexler of Overland Park, KS and Frank and Linda Taggart of Salina, KS. Ruby attends Prairie Trail Middle School and is a member of the Honor Roll. Ruby enjoys soccer, golf, reading and crafts. Relatives and friends are invited to worship with family and to attend the Kiddush luncheon following the service.
Purim is Just
Around the Corner!

And this year we are putting together something NEW and DIFFERENT to celebrate the holiday. Everyone has their own kisharon—their own abilities and talents. Mordechai used his power of persuasion to convince Esther to stand up for her people. Esther used her wit and courage to save the Jewish people from slaughter.

We may not be called upon to save a nation, but each of us has talents that bring joy to those around us. Come see the kisharon of your Beth Torah family at our 5780 Purim Talent Show: Beth Torah’s Got Kisharon! Sunday, March 8th, 6:00–8:00 p.m.

In mid-February I attended Songleader Boot Camp. Cantors, rabbis, songleaders, performers, youth chavurot, and educators from all over the United States converged on the St. Louis Jewish Community Center to learn and teach, to sing and play, to dance and pray. The theme of the week was being a good neighbor. Organizers and presenters wove together concepts of kindness to strangers from Mishpatim (the par’sha of that week), inclusivity, and Mr. Rogers. The experience was...humblesing. Ecstatic. Overwhelming. I don’t even know how long it will take me to process everything I learned, both consciously and unconsciously. But my big takeaway? The one thing I’m sure about? We are all in this together.

At the beginning of February, surrounded by my fellow music makers, worship leaders, congregation, and family, I chanted Torah for the first time. I use a lot of words for a lot of things. But I don’t have the words to describe that. How it felt building up, how it felt doing, how it felt after. What I can tell you is that it didn’t happen in a vacuum. I wanted to do it for myself, but what gave me the courage and drive to actually do it was all of you. Your support and encouragement, your faith and love and joy... You inspired me. You gave me courage. We are all in this together.

I hope you will join me and each other this month for two exciting programs. On March 8th, we’ll celebrate an old holiday in a new way: the 5780 “Beth Torah’s Got Kisharon!” Purim Talent Show. And on Wednesday, March 25th, we’ll open our doors, our arms, and our hearts even wider to celebrate Rosh Chodesh Nisan with our neighbors from B’nai Jehudah. Michelle Cox and I would love for you to join us as we welcome the new month with prayer and song.

We are all in this together.

Folks lining up to pray at SLBC. How amazing is that?!

Rosh Chodesh Nisan

Please join Michelle Cox and me on Wednesday, March 25th to welcome in the month of Nisan. Through song and prayer and a little bit of ‘drashing we’ll celebrate Rosh Chodesh together with our friends from B’nai Jehudah. We hope to see you there!

Wednesday, March 25th, 7:00 p.m.
Congregation Beth Torah sanctuary

Here’s the tale, nightingale: Our next Beit T’filah is going to be a gas! On Friday, April 17th we’ll celebrate Shabbat with many of our prayers set to the tunes of music from the 50s and 60s. Then we’ll grab a burger and fries at the Ulam Diner and rap about how music can work to change us, and maybe the world. So stable your horses and join us for the ginchiest Shabbat around! More info to come!
Hunger Never Takes a Holiday

As we approach the season of Passover, there will be hundreds among us who will struggle to put food on the table let alone those special items to celebrate a Seder. YOU can help make a difference. Join Jewish Family Services, the Rabbinical Association of Greater Kansas City and area congregations in collecting Passover food items. The first Seder begins Wednesday, April 8th. More than 160 families will be helped through your participation in the Passover food drive.

Among the items needed are grape juice, matzah and matzah meal, cake meal, baking mixes, matzah ball mix and soup. Our congregation has chosen to collect donations of matzah meal and grape juice; packaged items should be labeled “kosher for Passover.” Drop off items at your congregation through the end of March. Monetary donations are also being accepted by check or online through the JFS website, jfskc.org, and funds are used to purchase food items to include in the holiday food packages. By participating in the Passover Food Drive you are putting into action the traditional words of the Haggadah, “let all who are hungry come and eat.”

For more information about the Food Pantry, please contact Jo Hickey, JFS Food Pantry Director, at 913-327-8257 or email her at jhickey@jfskc.org.

Community Second Night of Passover Seder

A community second night of Passover Seder will be offered Thursday, April 9th, and takes place at The Temple, Congregation B’nai Jehudah beginning at 6:30 p.m. Family and friends come together as a community for the telling of the Passover story and to enjoy a traditional Seder meal. Information and mail-in registration forms are available at kcrabbi.org. Register online at rabbiskc.ticketspice.com/passover2020. Reservation deadline is Wednesday, April 1st. If you have questions, contact Annette Fish at afprogram@aol.com or call 913-327-4622.

Sponsored by the Rabbinical Association of Greater Kansas City and Jewish Family Services and funded in part by the Flo Harris Foundation of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Kansas City and supported by Congregations.

Volunteer Opportunities

Coupon Clipping

Are you interested in helping families of U.S. military veterans stretch their dollars further when they purchase groceries and necessities? Join Sheila Goldberg one Sunday a month at Beth Torah to clip coupons for our veteran families. Volunteers meet in the Ulam for good conversation, coffee, and bagels to perform this important mitzvah. Call the Beth Torah office for times and dates.

reStart

Although reStart in January has been modified, there are still opportunities to help prepare, serve food, and clean up after meals at the facility. You can come alone or with a group. Call Scott Franklin for more information at 913-645-1036.

These opportunities are part of the Joel Winston Social Justice Program at Congregation Beth Torah.
The Gift Shop has a wide assortment of items for all your Passover needs. You say: I don’t need anything, but are you sure? Spice up your Seder with a new Seder plate or new Haggadahs or finger puppets of the plagues. Going to someone’s home? You will need a hostess gift. We have delicious Barton’s Passover candy or serving pieces, or other gifts that your hostess will love. Having children at your Seder? It is time to visit the Gift Shop. We have a large variety of items to keep all ages happy.

The Gift Shop at CBT is a great resource that helps support our community. Please remember the Gift Shop needs your help. Everyone buys presents so come to the Gift Shop and let us help you find the perfect gift. Also, consider being a volunteer at the Gift Shop. If you have 2-4 hours a month, we need you to volunteer.

Our shop hours are Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (during religious school); Tuesday 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.; and Wednesday and Friday 10:00 a.m. to noon. You may also make an appointment so call Kelly Kaplan at 913-498-1474.

Kelly Kaplan
NAMI Family-To-Family Course
A free 12-week course for families with loved ones struggling with mental health issues begins Wednesday, March 4th, 12:30–3 p.m. Participants must commit to the 12-week course. Led by facilitators trained by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the course provides caregivers with communication and problem-solving techniques, coping mechanisms and self-care skills. The course will be held at the Nall Avenue Church of the Nazarene, 6301 Nall Ave., Prairie Village, KS. Inquire or register by calling Doris at 913-242-5227.

JFS Jewish Grief Support Group
The Grief and Loss Support Group meets the first and third Wednesday of each month from 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. at the Jewish Community Campus. The group provides the opportunity to address issues of loss and grief within a Jewish spiritual context. The Rabbinical Association of Greater Kansas City co-sponsors the group with Jewish Family Services and it is the only Jewish-based grief support group in the area. The group is co-facilitated by Rabbi Mark Levin and JFS Therapist Lauren Glass, LCSW. It is open to all faith backgrounds.

There is no charge to attend the support group; however, those wishing to participate (or who would like additional information) should contact Molly McGurk, JFS Director of Mental Health Services, at 913-327-8298 or via email at mmcgurk@jfskc.org.

Priya Resources Available
Priya provides financial, educational, and emotional support to individuals and couples in the Jewish community facing fertility challenges. The next Bloom support group for past, present or potential clients is Tuesday, March 10th, 6:30–8:00 p.m. at JFS Brookside. Contact Porsche Elkins at 913-730-1474 to learn more about the resources available through Priya.

You’re invited to a Marvelous Passover Seder Luncheon
Jewish Federation Women’s Philanthropy and Congregation B’nai Jehudah Sisterhood are excited to bring women from our entire Jewish community together for a Marvelous Passover Seder Luncheon.

Sunday, March 29th
Check-in and Schmoozing 12:00 p.m.
Luncheon and Seder 12:30 p.m.
Vaad Supervised

The Temple, Congregation B’nai Jehudah
12320 Nall Avenue, Overland Park, KS
Tickets: $36 (ages 25 and above)
$18 (ages 12-24)

Optional Attire: Vintage 1960’s glam inspired by Amazon’s hit show “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” is encouraged!

Register by Sunday, March 1st at jewishkansascity.org/2020Seder or contact Virginia Pennington, virginiap@jewishkc.org or call 913-327-8107.