

# MINYAN MONTHLY

Volume 8, No. 5

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Sivan-Tammuz 5755

## Reflections on Early Years in the Library Minyan

--by Marshall F. Kramer and  
Barry Shapiro

In late 1970, a group of young rabbis and their families, including the Rembaums, Kelmans and Spiegels, who were members of Temple Beth Am, approached Rabbi Jacob Pressman with a request to start an alternative Shabbat morning service in the Temple Beth Am Library. Recognizing the potential for developing a community of young teachers and students, Rabbi Pressman assigned Assistant Rabbi David Spritzer to assist in the formation of this Shabbat program.

Within a short time the Minyan attracted new members, both lay persons and Jewish educators. Among the early attendees were the Kramers, Shapiros, Spiegels, Haymans, Gershensons, Bassans, Levines, Dorffs, Dorphs, and Aronsons. (We're sure there were other early members of the Minyan but our recollections are rather vague in looking back to this hoary antiquity. Please excuse any errors of omission.) The Minyan also attracted some high school students, including Jeff Rabin, Mayer Brenner and Mark Bernstein.

Conducting its Shabbat services on a completely volunteer basis, the Minyan looked to its members to fulfill the ritual functions of the Shabbat morning services. Barry Shapiro, the first official Gabbai of the Minyan, was responsible for selecting daveners, and assigning Torah and haftarah readers. He served for about 2 1/2 years, then was succeeded by Marshall Kramer who served four years. Marshall was succeeded by Fred Landau, Joel Grossman and a host of other dedicated gabbaim continuing to the present.

Also, for a twelve year period, Rabbi Joel Rembaum acted as the coordinator for the assignment of the weekly drashot. Joel ensured that all members of the Minyan, both professional educators and lay persons, were encouraged to join in the joy of studying and teaching Torah.

When we think about what made the Library Minyan special during its formative years, we recall the sense of excitement which pervaded our approach to Jewish life. We were forming a community in the true spirit of the Conservative movement. Many of us had attended Camp Ramah or were affiliated with the University of Judaism as teachers or students. We took the development of Jewish ritual practice very seriously.



Each Shabbat morning, we would study together before starting to daven. On many occasions, Rabbi Stuart Kelman would review a section of the Talmud with us. Later Stuart headed a committee to study traditional texts, guiding us in developing ritual practices.

Among the issues discussed early on were the counting of women as part of the Minyan, calling women to the Torah, permitting children who had not yet reached their religious majority to read the Torah, permitting women to act as shlichot tzibbur, and the decision to adopt the triennial cycle for Torah reading.

Each of these issues was decided only after extensive study by all members of the Minyan. We remember particularly the discussion of the triennial cycle. We learned that there had been an ancient Palestinian tradition in which the Torah was read over a three year period starting with the month of Nissan, the first month of the Jewish year. For example, it would take three weeks to complete Parshat Bereshit. In addition, each portion of the weekly Torah portion had a corresponding haftarah. How exciting it was to read these "newly discovered" selections from the prophets. When we decided to adopt this triennial cycle approach to reading the Torah, we started our cycle in Nissan.

Initially, by following this methodology of reading, we were on a different cycle than the rest of the Jewish world. Ultimately, however, the Minyan decided to modify the Palestinian Torah reading cycle, adopting an approach to Torah reading where it would be completely read, over the course of three years, by dividing each of the traditional parshiyot into thirds. The Minyan still follows this practice today.

While we were in the Temple

Beth Am Library, we were very much aware of the many books which surrounded us each Shabbat. Looking back with a sense of mischievous glee, we remember the verse "v'aseh sifrecha haverecha (make your books your friends)". The very young children, among others Navah and Ari Kelman, Rachel Kramer, Judy Hayman, Michele and Rena Dorph, Yonah and Avi Rembaum, Mira Spiegel and Tammy and Michael Dorff, all of whom were just toddlers at the Minyan's inception, were constantly taking books off the shelves in the Library. Just as their homes were filled with books, so too did this Library become a second home for them on Shabbat morning.

We also remember the attention to hiddur mitzvah which pervaded the early years of the Minyan. While the shul provided us with an aron kodesh, Marlynn Dorff felt it was important to add beauty to our makom tefillah. How delighted we all were when Marlynn made some beautiful coverings for the tables upon which the Torah was read, and upon which the aron kodesh was set up each Shabbat.

We also felt that our Shabbat experience should also have a social aspect. Oftentimes, members of the Minyan would volunteer to bring wine, juice and cakes for an informal kiddush. We also had many wonderful lunches at the homes of the Minyan members. Such activities enhanced the sense of fellowship and community which we consciously tried to develop.

Looking back to the beginnings of the Minyan, which is now over twenty-four years old, we offer a hearty todah rabbah to the synagogue's rabbinic leadership who encouraged the development of this unique community. We know that the Library Minyan, which now totals around 200 members, will continue to be a vital part of the larger Temple Beth Am community.



## Report on the Microphone Debate

-- submitted by Mark Hess

The last issue of the Minyan Monthly featured a recommended process for decision-making on the microphone. We thank all those who provided input and are pleased to report that the process as reported has now been adopted. We will attempt to use the Minyan Monthly as much as possible to communicate meetings and progress on this issue.

Also included in last month's issue was a ballot which asked: "Should a vote be taken, before the end of July 1995, on the use of a microphone during some or all of the 5756/1995 High Holy Days?"

We received 89 ballots; 54 people voted against the interim vote and 35 people voted for the interim vote. As a result, no vote will be taken prior to the 5756/1995 High Holy Days. We wish to emphasize that this was not a referendum on the microphone, but rather a decision to begin the study and information gathering process. We will hold a vote on the need for a microphone after this is completed and we are in our new facility.

Please refer to the last issue for a list of the agreed upon ground rules, the issue which we will be discussing, and the information gathering process.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact either Mark or Miriam Hess at (310) 839-5574.

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## NEW STEERING CHAIR ANNOUNCED

A few weeks ago in shul, Ruth Askren announced her resignation as chair of the steering committee. She has done a great job during the past year, and we wish her a yasher koachah. A big welcome and yasher koach to our incoming chair, Alan Broidy. The Library Minyan tradition of service continues, thanks to these dedicated volunteers!

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## TORAH GABBAI ('IM) NEEDED

The position of Torah Gabbai is unoccupied. The job consists of orchestrating the Torah service at least once a month, and lining up others to do it whenever possible. Good Hebrew reading skills are required, and Torah reading skills are recommended though not essential. Call Arnie Wuhrman for more information, (310) 657-5533.

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## SEPARATE THE MICROPHONE FROM THE SPEAKER

-- Larry Harris

We who have young children often find that our spiritual needs conflict with our parental obligations. We would like to participate in the Minyan, but we need to care for our children.

With some children at some ages, we can sometimes responsibly manage them while we daven. Having children with us when they are interested and not too disruptive is wonderful for everyone. But when their interest wanes and their energy rises, they need to be elsewhere. Fortunately we have excellent child care to assist us.

Even with the best child care imaginable, however, some of us still have to accompany our children in child care. Many young children do not socialize well in groups that meet only for an hour and a half once a week, or in groups that change from week to week. These children need us there to feel secure. If we leave them alone in child care, they will associate unpleasant experiences with Shabbat and our shul.

We derive great pleasures from these obligations. Whether you are a parent, relative or friend, we hope that you too are blessed with these pleasures. However, the pleasures of child care are no substitute for the spiritual pleasures we derive from participating in the Minyan. We try to compensate by coming and going, but we lose a lot in the transitions. Those of us fortunate enough to be sharing child rearing responsibilities take our turns, but we are still away from the Minyan more than we desire. If only we could be in two places at once!

If child care were in an adjoining room, we could be in both places by standing in the doorway. Some of us did this in the chapel. One eye and ear were trained on the patio (or entry hall) and the other eye and ear were in the Minyan. This solution unfortunately is no longer even remotely feasible. Children being who they are, some of us will have to be in child care some of the time.

Although we cannot always be physically present in the Minyan, we could maintain a sense of contact if sightlines and sound paths could bring the Minyan to child care. We could be in child care and know what was going on in the Minyan. However, we neglected to give these requirements to our architects, and it is unlikely that they could have satisfied them had we done so.

Modern electronics can help rectify this lapse. I propose that we transmit sound from the Minyan to a corner of the child care room. This electronic sound path would allow parents to maintain some contact with the Minyan while they attend to their children. Since young children often require our presence more than our attention, this facility would allow us to be with them while we mind the Minyan.



This facility would also help show our children that we value the Minyan and its activities. When we remove the children from the Minyan, we also remove the Minyan from the children. Our example and their own curiosity will help remedy this problem.

I personally doubt that I could derive much spiritual satisfaction from davening in the child care room with the disembodied electronic voices of our Minyan. The aesthetics just would not be right for me. I would, however, greatly appreciate the opportunity to listen to the Torah, hear the drash, and ignore the announcements. Simply knowing where we are in the service would be important, because it would connect me more closely with the Minyan when I must be away.

The obvious extension of this argument would be to propose closed circuit TV. I will leave this path to others to follow, perhaps in a century or two. Given a choice between sound and sight, our rabbis of old understood that it is better to hear than see. (G-d forbid anyone should ever truly have to contemplate such a horrible choice.) If any of you are impatient to pursue both sight in addition to sound, I counsel patience and hope you'll take some consolation in the wisdom of our fathers.

If we adopted this proposal, we could arrange for the sound system to be turned on before Shabbat. This arrangement would help maintain our Shabbat sensibilities. We should also consider whether a separate line and corner should be arranged for the big congregation, since parents in that group also use child care.

This proposal represents a middle position between those who want sound amplification and those who do not. A careful discussion of this proposal may therefore help us clarify where our differences lie.

For example, those opposed to sound amplification on aesthetic grounds should find no fault with this proposal on that basis. Those opposed to sound amplification because our voices cause the electronic amplifier to do work on Shabbat should be opposed to this proposal for the same reason. Such opposition, however, appears to contradict our Conservative halacha.

If you are opposed to this proposal because it is too much like using an telephone on Shabbat, you may wish to discriminate between the problem of completing an electric circuit and the problem of doing work. As proposed, no new electric circuits would be made on Shabbat since the system would be turned on prior to Shabbat.

The arguments in this proposal also may represent a framework for a reasonable compromise on the issue of amplification. If you feel, as I do, that davening with an amplified voice is aesthetically unattractive, perhaps we should not do so. I feel we learn best when we hear most clearly. On this basis, we should amplify the drash, and (perhaps regrettably) the announcements too.

The more difficult question for me is whether we should amplify the reading of the Torah and Haftorah. The principle of a learning situation suggests we should use amplification because we read Torah and Haftorah to learn from them. I have two problems with this conclusion.

First, we also read Torah because we want (and are required?) to hear it. I would rather hear Torah in a human voice, as it was heard throughout most of our history. Second, I fear that undisciplined people will talk more if we amplify the reader. If the talkers among us raise their voices, amplification will only increase the noise level without bringing us much closer to comprehension.

In summary, I would like us to consider electronic transmission of sound from the Minyan to child care. The installation of this "adult monitor" would promote the values and community we cherish, without the aesthetic problems we normally associate with amplification.



## TBA BROTHERHOOD AND MEN'S CLUB MERGE

-- submitted by Barry Rosenblatt

As of June 1, the Temple Beth Am Men's Club has merged into the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was formed about four years ago, specifically to reach out to the younger men of the shul who may have felt alienated from the aging culture and programs of the Men's Club. Temple Beth Am Men's Club has a long history going back to the beginning of Beth Am, when it was known as Olympic Jewish Temple. In those days, the Men's Club was an opportunity for many young men to enjoy a sense of camaraderie and fun times within a shul organization.

And this center of vitality continued up through the early 1970's, but then began to taper off as the shul population aged without too much influx of younger families. By the late 1980's a gap had formed between the older and younger men's populations at the shul, and a special effort was needed to

reignite a core of new interest in Men's Club activity at Temple Beth Am. So a unique mailing was made to all male members of the shul under 55 years old, and a core group formed to plan and communicate events (such as an annual weekend retreat, family picnics and hikes, evenings at the ball game, and a food booth at Purim carnivals).

Now that some core of interest has formed, it is time to reestablish the Brotherhood as an inclusive organization for all men at the shul. Obviously, no event can be planned that will attract everyone's interest each time. Instead, a havurah approach will be taken: specific events will be planned to attract certain groups of interest, and core groups will be formed to plan their own range of events. Above all, there is an ongoing executive committee which meets regularly about once a month.

Even if you do not come to all events (and we hope you will make a special effort to attend some, so that the essential aspect of male camaraderie in the synagogue can grow with your share of effort and participation), it is hoped that you will give your financial support to the organization. These funds go towards certain responsibilities that Men's Clubs traditionally have in shuls, for example, giving bar and bat mitzvah gifts, and being ready when needed to lend a helping hand to various shul events and in the United Synagogue community.

So guys, please take a little time to fill in the survey that came to you recently, decide on a level of membership support, and send your responses soon to the shul, so that our small group of volunteers can sort through this stuff and get the new organization moving into our new direction. It can't be done without you, so please help. I hope to see you at our next retreat, the weekend of November 17-19.



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Please MAIL all changes and updates to the Minyan List to:

Ira Grossman  
6507 W. Olympic Place  
Los Angeles, CA 90035

(213) 651-1633 - home

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## WANTED:

Clip art for the Minyan Monthly, especially on Jewish themes. If you have or can recommend any good books, please contact Sharon Williams, (310) 838-1316.

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## FOR LEASE

Bright and beautiful townhouse, within walking distance of Temple Beth Am. 2 bedroom, 2 1/2 bath, loft, large sundeck. Available July 1, 1995. Please contact Jerry or Debbie Abeles at (310) 246-0990.

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## Attention Beth Am Singles Casino Night Planned at Nearby Congregation Mogen David

Singles age 25-45 are invited to a Casino Night Fundraiser sponsored by the Brandeis-Bardin Young Adults and Club Mogen David. You need not be a member of either organization to come, gamble, and try to win one of the numerous prizes to be awarded, including a three-day, two-night stay in Laughlin, Nevada.

\$20 at the door includes Kosher Buffet, DJ and dancing, plus \$100 play money. Non-alcoholic drinks for sale. Call Sharon Williams (310) 838-1316 or Gary Schultz (310) 276-5442 for more information, or call the JazzLine (310) 278-6868.

## ENGAGEMENT NEWS

### Sharon L. Williams & Neil E. Wenger

Those of you who were not in shul two weeks ago may have missed the announcement of my engagement. Neil Wenger and I met at a Brandeis-Bardin Young Adult weekend last September, and began dating shortly thereafter. We decided to tie the knot on June 14. The wedding date is being negotiated, but will be sometime in late August. We hope to hold an aufrouf at the Library Minyan the week before, as is traditional.

Some of you may have met Neil at services, perhaps at the kiddush for Jason's Bar Mitzvah. He works as a freelance editor in the entertainment industry, and originally hails from Brooklyn (Brighton Beach), New York City. He is 38 years old, and this will be his first marriage (as far as I know!). He's a little shy, so if you see us in shul, come up and introduce yourself!



MINYAN COMMITTEES/CONTACTS

- Chair, Steering Committee  
 Alan Broidy (213)933-8894
- Minyan Treasurer  
 Dale Bodenstern(213)937-7443
- Reading Torah or Haftorah  
 Val Goldstein (310)837-5503
- Gabai'im-Shabbat/Holiday Services  
 Torah Honors  
 Alan Broidy (213)933-8894  
 Eric Lesin (213)933-3096  
 Art Metz (310)276-6905  
 Itzhak Yaron (310)657-3760
- Drashot  
 Rachel Green (213)938-8110
- Torah Gabai'im  
 (temporarily vacant-see Gabbai)
- Child Care Committee  
 Teri Cohan Link(213)272-7401  
 Fran Grossman (213)933-5040  
 Michelle Wolf (213)954-8681  
 Larry Harris (310)556-7778
- Hospitality  
 Abby Harris (310)556-7778  
 Debbie Abeles (310)652-1505
- Kiddush  
 Judy Weinstock (213)933-1772  
 Carl Sunshine (213)934-7889
- Membership  
 Michael Rogson (213)939-5124
- Minyan Guide  
 Carl Sunshine (213)934-7889
- Minyan Monthly  
 Sharon Williams(310)838-1316  
 Dianne Winocur (213)652-4597  
 Michelle Wolf (213)954-8681
- Ritual Committee  
 Ronnie Cohen (213)658-8057
- Scheduling Events-Master Calendar  
 Val Goldstein (310)837-5503
- Shiva Minyans  
 Norm Saiger (310)837-5927  
 Rachel Green (213)938-8110

## Editor's Column

--by Sharon L. Williams

Lot's of new material in this month's issue of the Monthly! We finally got the long promised article from Marshall Kramer, his recollections of the Minyan's early days (p. 1-2). On page 3 you'll find a report by Mark Hess, reporting on the results of last month's vote. A compromise proposal on the microphone issue by Larry Harris begins on page 4, so read this article closely, even if you think you've already made up your mind. I thought so too, but his article has some excellent points for all of us to consider.

Barry Rosenblatt's report on the Brotherhood/Men's Club merger begins on page 6. Many thanks to all who contributed to this interesting issue! Keep those cards and letters coming.

Things have been very busy for me, thanks to an engagement, planning a wedding, the fundraiser noted on page 7, construction on my home, and a possible job search, but I still managed to get the Monthly out! Hopefully we'll have another full issue next month. Have a nice summer!

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 Mail or FAX articles for the Minyan Monthly to:

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 Los Angeles, CA 90034  
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 DON'T FORGET WE'RE STILL COLLECTING  
 CANNED AND PACKAGED FOODS FOR  
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