

# MINYAN MONTHLY

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## Process is Not a Dirty Word

An editorial by Robert Pflug

For many members of our kahal, process is a dirty word. In a laudable effort to eschew the top heavy beauracracy of many organizations, we have historically opted for an unstructured approach to carrying out the minyan's business. This philosophy, I believe, reflects the image many of us carry of our origins as a small, intimate group where word of mouth could suffice to inform the community of issues at hand, and where an informal conversation between a few members could reasonably be expected to represent the mostly homogeneous interests of the congregation.

While I share the nostalgia for this simpler, some would say mythical past, we must recognize that we are no longer that small, single-minded, wild and woolly alternative band of daveners. We comprise over 150 families, with an average shabbat attendance of 175 (more on holidays), larger than many independent synagogues. On many issues, the diversity of approaches and viewpoints runs the gamut.

Under such conditions, the only way to ensure that all voices are heard, that our fellow members continue to feel invested in this enterprise, and that we attain the best possible results for our continued health as an organization is to submit our decision making process to at least a modicum of procedural standards.

A case in point is the recent controversy concerning use of a microphone in our services. In the early stages of that discussion, a great deal of distress and concern resulted when many members felt that meetings on the subject were taking place with little notice, that decisions were being made without adequate input in sum, that their voices were not being heard. This situation did not, I would posit, arise out of malice on anyone's part but rather out of the *laissez faire* or negative attitude toward process noted above. It nonetheless resulted in tremendous anguish and divisiveness, separate and apart from any disagreements on the substantive issues.

Because of this situation, a select committee was created, headed by Miriam and Mark Hess, for the purpose of establishing an equitable process for handling this issue. That committee's work resulted in essentially two rules: 1. For any meeting at which the subject of use of a microphone is to be discussed, written notice must be sent to the membership at least two weeks in advance; and, 2. Any decision on a possible change in policy regarding that use must be made only by a written, mail?in vote of the

membership.

The immediate result of instituting those procedures was a great improvement in the tenor of the discussions. While serious differences remained regarding the underlying matter, all parties were able to go forward with the sense that they had a full opportunity to be heard and effect the decision, and that the democrartic process was safeguarded. (These discussions led to a mail in vote last June by which it was decided to continue our policy of not using a microphone, even at High Holiday services).

A number of months ago, the issue was raised again by several people proposing that a microphone be allowed for use by Bar or Bat Mitzvah children during their drash. Unfortunately, this time the procedure established by the select committee was not observed, apparently because it had been forgotten by the parties involved. The issue was discussed at a meeting of the ritual committee and at least one general minyan meeting, neither of which were preceded by any written notice.

Though verbal announcements were made for these meetings at services, not every concerned member is present at every service, or during the announcement portion of any particular service. Further, the agenda was not included in many of those verbal meeting announcements. It is precisely the inadequacy of such verbal announcements which the agreed process was codesigned to correct. (At the general meeting, with approximately 20 people present and despite objection, a vote was taken to authorize use of a microphone at one Bar Mitzvah.)

The result of this methodology was the return of many old concerns. People complained of inadequate or no notice of the meetings, feeling their voices were not being heard, and that decisions were again being made without adequate input. Notwithstanding the best intentions of all parties involved, the old animosities, quieted if not eliminated by use of the agreed procedures, rose to the surface again.

The solution to this problem is a simple one: we must carefully follow the agreed process, as outlined above. This is clearly in the best interest of those concerned with the use of a microphone, regardless of viewpoint, and those concerned with our minyan's tradition of participatory democracy.

*continued from page 1*

I believe we should also review our procedures in general, modifying them as necessary to insure that we all can have respect for our system of governance and the decisions it generates. Only then can we address the important issues of our community with civility and mutual regard, l'shem shamayim.

## LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

By Suzanne Weiss Morgen

You come to services to connect -- with God and with your fellow congregants. You come to raise your voice in prayer, in song, to chant, and to read. You are part of a wonderful community of worshippers.

The human voice, the first instrument, is the only instrument of divine creation. It is our powerful means of communication, expression, and connection. Our voice travels from us out into the world on the very breath which sustains us. This airflow allows us to move sound, and the sound created in turn moves and touches us. It is like the Hebrew word Ruakh, meaning the spirit or the wind. The two are connected, for the spirit is like the wind, the air. Although you cannot see it, you know of its existence and power.

Song as a way of worship has been called a "means of ascent." In fact, mystics believe the highest heavens hold a place of sanctuary that song alone can open. Having been a singer and voice teacher for many years, I believe the voice, this human music, can be a source of great joy, release, and energy. With greater awareness, new skills, directive tools, and practice you may experience feelings of ease, flow, focus, and intensity.

I have been teaching two different voice classes at Santa Monica College Community Services this Spring. I offer this information only to encourage you to explore your vocal possibilities with a minimum cost and time commitment. I'd like to offer something at Temple Beth Am in the future (if the interest exists) to help develop, enhance, and enrich participation during services or anytime you want your voice to be heard. I will happily provide more complete information to anyone interested by phone at (213) 935-9831.

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## Update on Microphone for Drash at Bar Mitzvahs

by Carl Sunshine

After being considered by the ritual committee as described in the last Minyan Monthly, the question of using a microphone just for the drash at Bar/Bat Mitzvahs was reviewed at the last Minyan Meeting. There was considerable discussion that perhaps the correct process was not being followed since the minyan had adopted a process for debating use of a microphone which calls for written notice of all meetings where the topic is to be discussed, and a mail ballot to all members to make any decision. However, it was felt by the majority of those at the meeting that the topic could properly be considered since the meeting had been announced several weeks in advance at least verbally, and the request was only to authorize a single trial use, with the more formal process to be used after the experiment to make a long-term decision.

After debating the pro's and con's, and hearing from two families whose children wanted to be able to use the microphone for delivering their drash, the group voted to allow the one-time experiment at Aaron Sunshine's Bar Mitzvah. Arrangements were made, and the sound system was prepared in advance, but technical problems developed that morning that the Sunshine family did not want to worry about on shabbat, so the microphone was not in fact used during Aaron's drash. Hence the question remains open for another family in future to pursue if desired.

## Dear Children of the Library Minyan,

This is a letter written to kids who are not Bar or Bat Mitzvahed yet. Parents, please read this to your children. My name is Adina Bodenstein and I am ten and a half years old. Even though my Bat Mitzvah is not until 1999, I am already thinking about some of it.

I would like a microphone for my Bat Mitzvah drash. I would like it because I am shy and I don't know if I could be loud enough for lots of people to hear me. I am going to work hard on my Bat Mitzvah drash, and I want people to hear it.

*continued on page 3*

## Beth Am Brings Order to Inner-City Center

A Passover Sedar, sponsored by the Social Action Committee of Temple Beth Am, was held at The Inner City Christian Center at Normandy and 60th Street on April 27, 1997. Rabbi Rembaum and Hazzan Lipton led the sedar for more than 30 TBA members and 90 church members. This project was the brainchild of Kathy Rosenblatt, Vice President of Social Action for Temple Beth Am. Everyone had a great time eating, singing and rejoicing in our mutual freedom.

The Social Action Committee and the Inner City Christian Center will be starting their first of three focus programs on race relations this June. There will be groups of 10 or 12 members from both congregations along with two facilitators who have been trained by Avis Ridley-Thomas' Office of Dispute Resolutions. To make this program worthwhile, Temple Beth Am needs a showing of at least 50 people to attend this important gathering. Please let Kathy Rosenblatt know if you are interested in this focus program and whether you would be available on Sunday evening June 22, or June 29, 1997.

Kathy Rosenblatt  
Social Action Vice President  
(213) 939-4767 (home)  
(310) 393-0411 ext. 7289 (work)

## Letter *continued from page 2*

I wrote this article to ask if other kids would like a microphone for their Bar or Bat Mizvah drash, also. When we have our Bar or Bat Mitzvah we have to do a drash; it really isn't a choice. And we usually have to do it for a big crowd.

Since we are still kids, we can't vote yet in the Library Minyan about things like the microphone. But we can still talk about it to our parents and other grown-ups in the minyan. Kids, you might not even know yet what you want to do. But if you decide you would like a microphone, too, please tell Bob Braun, the head of the Ritual Committee or write a letter to the *Minyan Monthly*. This is the only way people will know.

Thanks for reading and thinking about this letter.

Adina Bodenstein.

# TREASURER'S REPORT

The Library Minyan would like to thank the following people for their contributions. Donations help us provide weekly Shabbat Kiddushes and child care.

*In honor of Avi Rembaum's marriage*  
*In honor of the birth of Rachel Miriam Spronz*  
*In honor of Ms. Bertha Aronson's birthday*  
*In memory of Fran Grossman's father*  
*In honor of Abby Harris' Bat Mitzvah*  
*In honor of Danny Glass' Bar Mitzvah*  
*From Cathie Lippman and Jules Kamin and Family*

*20 Siddurim have been donated to the Library Minyan on the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of*  
*Ariel Chaim Friedman*  
*From Eddie, Esther and Ma'ayan*

*In memory of Milton Richmond,*  
*father of Fran Grossman*  
*From The Krug Family*

*In honor of the Library Minyan*  
*From Daniel and Alice Nussbaum*

*In honor of the Bat Mizvah of Susan Grinel*  
*From Harry Brenner*

Contributions are welcome anytime and for any occasion. Please make your checks payable to "Library Minyan-Temple Beth Am". All donations may be mailed to the synagogue or to Dale Bodenstein, Treasurer of the Library Minyan.

Temple Beth Am  
1039 S. La Cienega Blvd.  
L.A., CA 90035

Dale Bodenstein  
1121 S. Spaulding Ave.  
L.A., CA 90019



On the first day of Passover I read Haftorah in the Library Minyan. This is not something I do on a regular basis (my third time) and I was a little nervous. As I finished the initial blessings and began reading the Haftorah, I heard someone in the front left section say to someone else, "she sounds nervous", I heard another person to my front right chanting along with me (even though their trope tune was different from mine), and I heard the murmur of voices from behind my shoulders.

I can see why the idea of having a microphone in our minyan would be a big concern for a family who is celebrating the B'nai Mitzvah of their child. It is difficult enough to be on the bimah, let alone having to deal with all the commotion. I do believe there is a solution.

I don't have a small voice and I lead services on a regular basis. However, leading services is much different from reading Torah, Haftorah or giving a Drasha. When you are leading services, the Kahal participates in the services with you and when you read Torah, Haftorah or give a Drasha, you are doing it alone. Regardless if you're a shy teenager with a soft voice or a well-greased Torah reader, you still deserve respect from the community for your dedication to learn the portion, let alone the sanctity of the service you are giving the congregation.

I grew up in a shul where the sanctuary was larger than our chapel and without the state-of-the-art acoustics with which our chapel has been blessed. Our shul never had a microphone for any occasion. We didn't need one. There were always chitchating adults and restless children in shul, but when it came time for the Torah service (including the D'var Torah) the room fell silent - those who could not remain quiet left the sanctuary before the Torah was laid out on the *shulchan*. During Torah service the doors remained closed. Neither children nor adults entered the sanctuary from the hallway. There were no Shul Police, because people knew shul decorum. Silence was given out of respect for the person on the bimah as well as for the sanctity of the service being performed. The smallest voice of young B'nai Mitzvah could be heard, even in the back of the "women's section".

In order to prove my point that respect and decorum will outweigh the necessity for a microphone, I make the following suggestions: 1) Go outside into the lobby or sit outside the acoustical area (behind the permanent seats in

the back of the chapel) if you think you'll have the urge to socialize during the Torah Service and Drasha. 2) Please take your children into the lobby if they are screaming or talking aloud. Everyone around you is having a hard time listening, too. 3) Sit closer to the bimah. There are always plenty of empty seats up front. When it is quiet, you really can hear. 4) Volunteer to read Torah, Haftorah or give a Drasha in the Minyan. If you don't know how, take Hazzan Lipton's Baal Tefila class or read Elliot Dorff's suggestions on how to give a D'var Torah (the previous *Minyan Monthly*). I think you'll understand what I'm talking about after you've been there.

P.S. During the last Bar Mitzvah in the Library Minyan the Koppelove Hall was opened for anticipated extra guests. Many seats up front remained vacant while those in the back had scattered occupancy. When the second area is open, it allows the sound to "drop" and not carry through the whole room. I suggest that we keep Koppelove Hall closed (unless we are expecting 100+ more people) and ask people to take the seats up front. The chapel and Chermisqui Hall combined seat over 200 people. I believe if we're all quiet and sitting closer to the front, we'll be able to hear even the small voice of a B'nai Mitzvah.

Benjy's Bar Mitzvah is in December 1998, and he doesn't want to use a microphone. He just wants you to listen quietly and laugh when it's appropriate.

Sandra Braun

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## ALL ABOARD THE S.S. TEMKIN

Marshall Temkin, Past-President of Temple Beth Am is being honored at the Annual Dinner Dance on June 8, 1997, at Temple Beth Am. This is our shul's biggest and most important fund-raising event of the year.

Have you made your reservations? Join a number of your fellow Minyan members at the dinner dance. Minyan member Sandra Braun is Co-chairing the evening's Silent Auction. Bid on vacations in Hawaii, Israel and Mexico. Restaurants, retail stores, jewelry, sports memorabilia, Hollywood Bowl, Dodgers, and Lakers tickets, fine art, private study sessions with the Rabbis, a High-holiday parking spot outside the main shul entrance, a private screening and catered party for 50 at William Morris Agency and more. All this followed by a live show and dinner catered by Brenda Walt (The dinner is Co-chaired by Minyan members, Judy Weinstock and Sheila Spiwak), with live music and dancing.

If you can't make the dinner dance, place an ad in the commemorative journal. The synagogue needs your support.

For more information call the shul at (310) 652-7353.



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19-Apr-97

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