

Congregation Sons of Israel

2715 W Tilghman St
Allentown PA 18104
www.sonsofisrael.net
april2715@gmail.com
Phone: 610-433-6089
Fax: 610-433-6080

Rabbi David Wilensky
rdwilensky@gmail.com

President

Dr. Moshe Markowitz
moshe.markowitz@me.com

VP of Education

Hartley Lachter
Hartley.Lachter@gw.muhlenberg.edu

VP of Finance

Lisa Markowitz
lmarko77@me.com

VP of Membership

Ilene Levin-Dando
levindando@yahoo.com

VP of Youth

Dr. Scott Brenner
Scott.Brenner@lvh.com

Men's Club Chair

Marcel Guindine
guindine@verizon.net

Sisterhood Chair

Amy Fisher
asfisher@ptd.net

Ritual Committee Chair

Jeff Blinder
jblinder@ptd.net

Social Committee Chair

Regina Brenner
Regina.brenner@rcn.com

House Committee Chairs

Joe Aflalo
calishco@aol.com
Marcel Guindine
guindine@verizon.net

Upcoming Events

A Memorial Concert for Steve Weiner, sponsored by the Dr. Steven W. Weiner Memorial Fund, featuring the Afro-Semitic Experience, will take place on Saturday evening, February 25th. Seating and dessert at 8:00 p.m. Cost: SOI members \$20 and non-members \$25 before February 20th. After February 20th: \$25/\$30 respectively.

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Hamantashen Order Forms were mailed out this past week. The deadline for orders is Tuesday, February 21st.

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Dr. Arnold Slyper will be speaking on the **"The Binding of Isaac – the Non-Event that Changed the World"** on Wednesday evenings February 22nd and 29th at 8:00 p.m. in the shul library. Using sources from the Bible, Midrash, Mesopotamian myth and the Koran, Dr. Slyper will show that this non-happening forever changed religious thought and practice.

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It's Hamantashen baking time! The next Sisterhood meeting will take place in the kitchen on Sunday, Feb. 26th from 10 a.m. to -1 p.m. and from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Inclement weather and possible lack of freezer space date will be Sunday, March 4th. Same time, same place. We need bakers for both shifts. The day will begin with a Sisterhood meeting. Please call Leslie Schmier at 610-439-0354 or Sharon Guindine at 610-398-8146 to RSVP.

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Our Annual **Purim Seudah, "Party at the Persian Palace"**, will feature a unique Persian menu with Persian décor and Persian music, as well as magician entertainment and a Purim-themed costume contest for children. Please join us on Purim day, March 8th at 5:30 p.m. Cost: \$15 adult/\$7 child/\$36 early bird rate for families if paid by Mar. 1st. Wine will be available for sale at the meal.

Regular Classes

Daily		
Daf Yomi	Sunday—Friday	7:30 AM
Sundays		
Torah Lishma Club with R' Wilensky & Sharly Digadker		8:30 AM
Tuesdays		
In-Depth Gemara Class with Rabbi Wilensky		7:00 PM
"Wednesdays"		
"The Book of Ezra" with Judy Slyper		7:00 PM
Shabbos		
Beginner's Gemara with Dr. Henry Grossbard		8:00 AM
Parsha Class with R' Wilensky		12 Noon
Daf Yomi		1 hr. prior to Mincha



קהילת בני ישראל
Congregation Sons of Israel

Parshat Yitro
18 Shevat 5772
February 11, 2012

Announcements

Kiddush presented by the following members of our Kiddush Club:

Jeff & Jill Blinder, Scott & Cheryl Brenner, Arthur & Susan Hochhauser and Alex & Robin Rosenau

A speedy recovery to Lauren Halper, Arlene Nagel and to Jay Scherline.

Our annual **Purim Gala** begins Sunday evening, March 11th, at 6:30 p.m. If you placed an ad in our journal but have not RSVP'd for the dinner, please do so ASAP.

Shabbos Schedule

8:00 AM	Beginner's Gemara Class
9:00 AM	Shacharis
10:20 AM	Jr. Congregation
12:00 noon	Parsha Class
4:00 PM	Daf Yomi
5:00 PM	Mincha, Shalosh Se'udos
6:14 PM	Shabbat concludes

Minyanim Feb. 12-18

	Sunday 2/12	Monday 2/13	Tuesday 2/14	Wed 2/15	Thursday 2/16	Friday 2/17	Shabbos 2/18
AM	8:30 AM	6:30 AM	6:45 AM	6:45 AM	6:30 AM	6:45 AM	9:00 AM
PM	5:10 PM	5:10 PM	5:10 PM	5:10 PM	5:10 PM	5:20 PM	5:05 PM

Yitro

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"The Seeker"

"This is the most shocking and astounding phrase in the entire Torah!"

These were the words uttered, in Hebrew, by the aging and ailing rabbi who was visiting Baltimore for medical treatment, where I lived long ago. The rabbi was from Israel, where he was the revered and popular dean of a rather famous yeshiva. The treatment he needed was unavailable in Israel at the time, so he journeyed to the community where I was serving as a young pulpit rabbi.

I had long ago developed the habit of taking advantage of the opportunity to meet visitors of this sort. He was too frail to give a formal lecture, but he found it invigorating to sit with three or four of us and in engage in conversation about various religious subjects, his favorite one being the weekly Torah portion. I felt especially privileged to be a part of that small group.

The Torah portion that week was Parshat Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23), which we ourselves will read in the synagogue this Shabbat.

Before identifying the shocking phrase which he wished to discuss, he asked us to participate in the following thought experiment:

"Imagine that you are asked to write a brief biographical sketch of some saintly rabbinic figure, such as Rabbi Yisrael

Meyer HaKohen, known as the Chofetz Chaim, and you happened to know that this man's father-in-law was some rogue who had a disreputable past. Would you share the nature of the father-in-law's past in a biography for all to see? Would it not be embarrassing for both the Chofetz Chaim and his father-in-law to publicize the latter's past misdeeds, especially if he had long repented of them?"

He then launched into a very eloquent and forceful discourse about the ethical prohibitions against publicly disclosing a person's past, or even reminding him of it in private. To bolster his argument, he quoted the following passage from Maimonides' Mishneh Torah: "It is a serious sin to say to a penitent, 'Remember what you once did,' or even to mention those past actions in his presence, thus embarrassing him... We are admonished by the Torah not to abuse others verbally..." (Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuvah 7:8)

He then drew our attention to the opening verse in this week's Torah portion: "And Yitro the High Priest of Midian and the father-in-law of Moses, heard about all that the Almighty had done for Moses and Israel his nation..." (Exodus 18:1)

"In the same breath," he exclaimed, "he is referred to as a pagan priest and as the father-in-law of Moses! What a combination of titles! Yes, he was an idolater and the zaide of Moses' children. This is as unlikely as the witch doctor of some primitive tribe who is also the very close personal advisor of the saintly Chofetz Chaim; or, the Archbishop of Canterbury as the mentor of some Chassidic sage!! Are not those juxtapositions jarring,

astonishing, irreconcilable?"

Now that you have some sense of how graphic and dramatic this honored guest to our community could be, I will identify him by name. His name was Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broida, and he was the dean of the Chevron Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Broida went on to offer a suggestion as to why Yitro is introduced to us again in this week's Torah portion in terms of his old title, High Priest of Midian. After all, at this point in time he had renounced his idolatrous past, and indeed, according to rabbinic tradition, was about to convert to Judaism.

"You see," taught Rabbi Broide, "our tradition respects the seeker, the person who searches for the truth and never tires of that search, no matter how many blind alleys he encounters and no matter how much frustration he experiences. Yitro is described as an individual who worshiped every idol in the world in search of the truth. As he became disappointed with each faith that he explored and with each religion that he practiced, he rejected that path and renewed his search. He retains the title High Priest of Midian because that title represents the heights he could achieve in the religious hierarchy within which he sought truth. That title is symbolic of the degree to which Yitro was a seeker of truth."

The old man at this point began to show signs of fatigue, and we begged him to stop his discourse and rest. But he told us that he refused to rest until he was convinced that we had learned the lesson he was trying to teach. "That lesson," he

whispered hoarsely, "is best conveyed in the words of Talmud in Tractate Gittin 43a: 'No man truly achieves Torah knowledge without first experiencing error.' " When a person's errors in life culminate in his finally making proper choices and correct decisions, then those errors are to be publicized and respected, because they are indicators of the degree to which that person was a seeker.

As far as I can recall, Rabbi Broida did not share with us on that occasion the following gematria. As you may know, every Hebrew word has a numeric equivalent, also known as a gematria, and often very diverse terms have identical numerical equivalents, suggesting otherwise unpredictable connections. The proper name "Yitro" has the numeric equivalent of 416. Two contradictory Hebrew terms have the exact same numeric equivalent. Those terms are "he was an idolatrous priest (komer haya lavodah zara)" and "The Torah (HaTorah)", indicating that this one individual combined within himself two diametrically opposed tendencies. One of those tendencies, HaTorah, prevailed, but only because of the lessons learned from his experiences with idolatry. For those of you who are intrigued by gematria, I suggest you consult the commentary of Ba'al HaTurim to corroborate this one.

Every year since I was privileged to first learn Rabbi Broida's lesson, I look forward to the opening verse of the Torah portion which we will all have the opportunity to read this week. Not only must we learn from our mistakes, but it is only by virtue of making those mistakes that we ultimately learn. That is a powerful and practical lesson indeed.