



Beth Am commentator

December 24, 1976

Miami, Florida

RELIGIOUS SERVICE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 8:30 p.m., RABBI BAUMGARD

"Ask The Rabbi"

Collegian Service

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25, 11:15 a.m., TORAH SERVICE

Adult Ed Active Over The Winter

HEBREW FROM SCRATCH OFFERED MORNINGS

Lenore Kipper's course, Hebrew From Scratch In Only Four Weeks, is becoming a perennial favorite, fully subscribed every time she offers it, because it works. In four weeks, you can learn enough Hebrew to participate in the worship service. For the first time, this course is being offered mornings, four Thursday mornings, beginning January 20, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., in Room 24. There is no fee for this course, but registration will be limited.

RABBI CHEFITZ REPEATS SEX ETHICS COURSE

Why go into hibernation over the winter watching TV re-runs? If you were watching TV the first time the Sex Ethics and the Jewish Framework course was offered, here's the chance to make amends. On the four Wednesday evenings of January, the light of 3,000 years of tradition will be turned on all aspects of sexual behavior. Leave your preconceived notions behind and come prepared to encounter a frankness you would not have imagined possible in religious thought. The course begins Wednesday evening, January 5, 8:00 to 10:00 p.m., in Room 28. No fee.

COMPREHENSIVE HEBREW COURSE OFFERED HERE

If you want a real understanding of the Hebrew language, more than four weeks are required. For the first time at Beth Am, we are providing comprehensive instruction, six hours a week, beginning January 4 and continuing through April 19. Classes will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., in Room 24. There will be one track for beginners and another for intermediate students. This course is open to anyone 16 years and over, and may be taken for high school foreign language credit. It is being offered in coordination with the Southwest Miami Senior High Adult Education Center, and the teacher, Sarah Cohen, has been teaching Hebrew for decades. The registration fee of \$5 will be waived for senior citizens.

ADULT BIBLE CLASS CONTINUES

Rabbi Chofitz will resume his continuing class in Bible and Commentaries in January, beginning Tuesday morning, January 4. The class will meet every Tuesday morning from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. in the library. New students are always welcome. We are presently working our way through the Book of Genesis with the aid of Rashi's commentary, but occasionally we venture out into the Midrash and other rabbinic materials.

No knowledge of Hebrew or special background is required. Just come to the library Tuesday mornings and, within a few weeks, you will be an active participant.

Call the Temple office to register for any or all adult ed classes.

SUMMER CAMP COUNSELLOR INTERVIEWS SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22

Interviews for senior counsellors, junior counsellors and specialists for Beth Am's summer program will be held at the Temple in Room 28 on Wednesday, December 22. Applications for openings are available in the Temple office from Rhoda Bernheimer and should be brought with you at the time of the interview between 10 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Rose Ashbes, our director, will be conducting the interviews on the 22nd. If you have any questions, Rose can be reached at home after 6:00 p.m. at 279-9791.

Brotherhood Meeting January 5 Features Wine And Cheese Tasting

Brotherhood of Temple Beth Am cordially invites you to a wine and cheese night Wednesday, January 5, 1977, in the Social Hall at 8:00 p.m. Wine and cheese-tasting free to Brotherhood members. Call the Temple office for reservations, 667-5587.

NEW MEMBERS FOR BROTHERHOOD

Membership is the backbone of an organization. Over the years, some pass away, some move away, but Brotherhood goes on and on. We welcome new members--we want new members. Make our long range programming a reality. Mail your check for Brotherhood dues (\$15.00) tomorrow to Brotherhood of Temple Beth Am.

SERVICE PROGRAMS FOR TEMPLE BY BROTHERHOOD

Parent Child Dinner	Annual Tennis Tournament
Yom Kippur Break-the-Fast	Purim Carnival
Membership Dinner - Awards	Sunday Breakfast Programs
Beth Am Junior Olympics	Blood Bank
Installation Dinner	Interfaith Dinner
- Olympic Awards	

Covered Dish Dinner Sunday, January 9

On Sunday, January 9, 1977, at 6:00 p.m., Sisterhood and Brotherhood invite you to come to the Youth Lounge with your family and a "Covered Dish." Share an unforgettable evening of food, friendship, family and fun--free. Let us know what you'll be bringing, and how many persons in your family will attend. Please R.S.V.P. before January 2--Temple office, 667-5587.

COMING IN JANUARY: PROFESSIONAL DRAMA

Wednesday evening, January 19, "A Choice To Make," for the whole family, by the Players Repertory Theater. Thought-provoking entertainment. Professional drama here at Beth Am. Mark your calendar. Watch the COMMENTATOR for more details.

COLLEGIAN SERVICE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 8:30 p.m.

Services read by collegians

Refreshments for collegians only in gym

Bring your guitar

Question and Answer session in lieu of sermon

"Ask the Rabbi"--What's troubling you?



FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

'I Found It'

The Current Campaign To Affirm Christianity
And Its Effect On Jews

What do you say when a Christian comes up to you and, in one way or another, tries to interest you in his religion with the hope of "leading you to the greater light" or "saving you from hell"? This question has been asked me repeatedly of late by our young people. They are being besieged in the halls and playgrounds of their schools by young Christians who apparently deem it their duty to convert everyone to their particular religion. The present campaign is well organized. It is part of an area-wide, perhaps national, campaign, which is well financed. It is tied in with TV advertising, radio advertising, and it is sponsored by many churches in our area. Participating Christian children, some of them in self-defense, wear buttons reading, "I Found It," the slogan of the campaign. Those not wearing the button are obviously outsiders. They are "not saved," doomed to hell, perhaps, candidates for conversion. They are anything but individuals to be respected for their own belief and to be allowed the privilege of being different. No wonder our Jewish young people feel threatened and isolated by this campaign.

Our young people ask me, "What do we say to these missionaries?" It is very difficult to tell a fervent fundamentalist Christian that you think his God is no God at all, but merely a good man. He can hardly think well of you when you challenge his belief, but does he not invite this answer when he tries to teach you that your belief is inadequate? Such would-be converters come primed with a few quotations from scripture. Unfortunately, these few lines are more than many Jewish children have memorized, and they are unable to respond with an equal show of "scholarship." These are, of course, the same old lines which Christians have presented to Jews for thousands of years, and Jewish teachers have said over and over again that in OUR scripture (and it is OUR scripture; we wrote it with our lives), the lines do not have the meaning Christians read into them. Of course, anyone can take a line of Scripture and make of it what he wishes, and Christians have that right, but they cannot take away from us our right to read our Scripture as we wrote it and lived it. Yet, some of the missionaries do exercise just this authority. They tell us, "You don't understand your own Scripture. Let us interpret your creation for you." How hard can you put somebody down!

Jewish children would be wise to learn a little Scripture (we have prepared mimeographed material entitled "Know How to Answer." It is available at the office), but in my many years of dealing with such missionaries, I have found that they do not want to be answered, nor do they wish to listen to our side. They want to convert us, save us, do their thing as a Christian. They do not want a dialogue. The very word dialogue suggests that the two parties involved stand on equal ground, where the missionary assumes that he has the real answer and you are simply ignorant or confused. It has been my experience that dialogue is not possible with fervent missionaries, so I do not participate in it with them.

For Jewish children, the value of learning a little Scripture, at the very least on the points the missionary brings up, is that the child can know what his own tradition says and feel secure in his knowledge. The learning is for his own sake, as a Jew, not for arguing with the missionary. Besides, Judaism teaches us to respect the other person's religion and not to try to convince him that he is wrong. I take no pleasure in convincing a Christian that his interpretation of our Scripture is not based on scholarship. I do not wish to undermine his faith. For example, I have studied the question of the messiah in infinite detail, including many Christian sources. I can marshal sufficient facts in a few minutes to counter any suggestion that Jesus is prophesized in the Old Testament, but when I am asked a question concerning the messiah on my visits to churches, I do not present these facts, nor do I answer the question. I simply say, "the purpose of my visit here is to emphasize the areas in which we agree, not to make points for the Jewish position."

Elsewhere on this page, you will find a listing of "Basic Jewish Ideas." Jews have believed in these ideas down through the centuries, in spite of the fact that their rituals and forms have changed. Read these ideas and study them. You will find that fundamentalist Christianity disagrees with many of these ideas. It is here that the real difference between Judaism and Christianity can be seen. The interpretation of Scripture varies because Jews and Christians have different basic ideas about the world, about God, and about the role of man.

It should be made clear that all Christians are not involved in the current "I found it" campaign. This is apparently financed and projected by certain Protestant Churches. Other Protestants are embarrassed by this attempt to teach that Christianity or Jesus can be "found" in a flash. They hold that becoming a Christian is a matter of slow development and constant effort. This is much closer to our Jewish view that the search for God is a life's effort and the search for the truth is never ending.

BASIC JEWISH IDEAS While Judaism is the evolving and changing religious expression of the Jewish people, Jews have always believed a basic core in all ages. Certainly, the core of our belief as understood by Reform Judaism is as follows:

1. GOD IS ONE--that is, there is one plan and purpose for the universe; there are no conflicting wills; no good god competing with a devil; nor are there greater and lesser gods or divine beings.
2. THE NATURE OF THIS GOD IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN TERMS OF CREATION, LAW, JUSTICE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS, LOVE--that is, He is not blind force, acting on sudden whim, nor is He angry and punitive (this understanding of the nature of God evolved over thousands of years and is open to new insights). God is not to be understood in terms of human powers or definitions and is beyond man's full comprehension.
3. THERE IS A TORAH, A MORAL LAW, UNDERGIRDING THE UNIVERSE, AND MAN'S HAPPINESS AND THE STABILITY OF SOCIETY DEPEND ON THE LEARNING AND OBSERVANCE OF THIS LAW.
4. A MAN'S RELIGIOSITY IS TO BE DEDUCED FROM HIS ACTIONS, NOT FROM HIS STATED BELIEFS. (CONDUCT, NOT PROFESSED FAITH, IS THE CRITICAL MATTER).
5. MAN IS BORN WITH THE POTENTIAL TO BE GOOD OR EVIL DEPENDING UPON HIS OWN CHOICE TO FOLLOW THE MORAL LAW. He is not born in "original sin," nor need he be mystically or miraculously "saved" from this "sin." Hence, the notion of the growth and improvement in the character of man by creating the good society becomes possible.
6. THIS WORLD IS THE CENTER OF MAN'S EXISTENCE. Whatever the "world to come" may be, man must correct the evil in this world. "It is not incumbent upon him to finish the task, but neither is he free to neglect it."
7. MEN MUST STRIVE TOWARDS A MESSIANIC DAY, WHEN ALL MEN SHALL LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY. There is a meaningful future ahead which men must strive to achieve with God's help. There is a part of the Messiah in all of us, and we must bring the pieces together to create "God's Kingdom."