In our contemporary world, there are many, many ways to be Jewish: religious, ethnic, cultural, national, spiritual, genetic… and some folks born to Jewish parents opt out completely. You can say, everyone is “Jewish” by choice these days.

Your clergy share their reflections on when they made the choice to be Jewish.

**Temple Beth El**

**Temple e-Talk**

**Clergy Corner**

**Jewish By Choice**

Four Perspectives

**by Rabbi Peter Levi**

People often ask: "Why did you want to become a rabbi?" For me, the decision to become a rabbi was easy. The tough decision was whether I would be Jewish—that is, whether or not Judaism would be an active part of my life. I was always a Jew, but no part of my life was Jewish, except perhaps for my affection for bagels & lox and Woody Allen movies. This began to change in my mid-twenties when a friend of mine said: “Peter, you’re Jewish. You should do Jewish things.” Being a reasonable person, this made sense. For example, I call myself a tennis player not just because I like the idea of tennis, but because I in fact go out and play tennis. Similarly, I had always called myself Jewish, but I wasn’t doing anything Jewish. So I began to check it out.

**by Rabbi Rachel Kort**

I want to honor my parents for working hard to instill a rock solid Jewish identity in me and my sister. The synagogue where I grew up was my second home, Jewish education (even post bat mitzvah) was not an option, Shabbat dinner each week as a family was mandatory, and my parents sacrificed personal and family vacations to send me and my sister to Jewish summer camp and to Israel as teens. My Jewish identity was a huge priority for my parents and their hard work paid off. I have never considered being Jewish as a choice, but how I choose to be Jewish is another story.

**by Rabbi K’vod Wieder**

Growing up in Orange County in the 1980’s, I learned quickly that this incomprehensible part of me, called Jewish, was not desirable in the eyes of my peers. Hebrew school was alienating and irrelevant and I quickly learned to not only hide this part of my identity, but to imagine that it was like a garment of clothing that I could choose not to wear.

**by Cantor Natalie Young**

As long as I can remember, being Jewish was not something I had to decide on. It was always an integral part of my identity. I never felt that I needed to do anything special to “be” Jewish though I certainly grew up with Jewish rituals and traditions that infused spirituality and meaning into my life. I never considered myself particularly religious, but identified more with the spiritual and communal aspects of the Jewish faith. While halacha (Jewish law) was never a guiding force in how I connected to Judaism and the Jewish people, I have looked to create my own meanings from tradition. I have never felt compelled to follow traditions just because they are there. I want to have an understanding of my practices. I feel that traditions are there to help us connect to the world around us and bring sanctity into our lives.

Check out Upcoming Adult Learning Opportunities on Page 9!
One afternoon while talking with a brilliant professor about a paper I was writing concerning the indexicality of locatives (don’t fret if you have no idea what that is), I asked the question: “what is the purpose of philosophy?” He gave me a wonderful response perfectly appropriate for academic world. When he saw the dissatisfaction on my face, he added, "Well, we are not curing cancer if that is what you mean.” And I was done. Reason had failed me. I decided to be guided by the on-going revelation our people began experiencing at Mount Sinai. I decided to be Jewish. And since I was already a teacher, becoming a rabbi followed naturally.

Rabbi Rachel Kort continued from page 1 I spent the summer before my senior year in high school as a Bronfman Youth Fellow studying in Jerusalem with twenty or so Jewish teens representing the rich tapestry of the American Jewish community. It was the first time I had been exposed to different expressions of Judaism. Rich conversations with friends inspired by our teachers, Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative rabbis, invited me to ask questions about how I had always practiced Judaism and thought about God and the Jewish People. These conversations and questions were the catalyst for

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Rabbi Kort continued from page 21
my choosing to explore Judaism on a deep level in college and now as an adult.

While Judaism isn't a choice in my life, each and every day I choose how to be a Jew. My work as a rabbi and educator is a tribute to my mom and dad. It is my passion and purpose to help create a strong sense of Jewish being in our Temple's children and then offer adults and teens guidance to help make thoughtful, personal Jewish choices in their lives.

Rabbi K’vod Wieder continued from page 1 During my last years of high school I became a seeker of truth. I started to sense the presence of God in my life and became obsessed with trying to understand this mystery that I was beginning to experience. With all of its anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Torah and patriarchal language of the prayerbook, Judaism clearly didn’t seem to offer me anything on my journey and for a while I didn’t even consider exploring this aspect of my heritage. Instead, the pathways of yoga and eastern meditation practices spoke more directly to this unfolding experience of Presence in my life.

In my third or fourth year of college, I had an experience in deep meditation that changed the course of my life. All of those “irrelevant” prayers and melodies that I had begrudgingly sung at my Bar Mitzvah started to reverberate through my body. I began to experience God in a way I had never experienced before - as a Presence that wanted me to be close to Him.

This Presence cared about me and who I was becoming. With tears streaming down my face and the forgotten melodies on my lips, I had a vision of ancestors, both in a distant past and present with me at the same time, gazing at me approvingly at that moment, saying “It’s time you finally came home.”

From that moment on, I knew that there was a deep dimension of my being, maybe called “soul,” that was Jewish. I had no idea what that meant. I still don’t know what it means. All I know is that the truth of who I am is drawn to the Torah, the Jewish people, and sharing our unique light with the world. Choosing Judaism means choosing to be myself.

Cantor Natalie Young continued from page 1 When I think about what it is that makes me feel Jewish, I realize that many things I took from my experiences at camp. Jewish music and dancing, communal meals, Havdalah under the stars, being out in nature alone or with friends and thinking about my relationship with God. Truth be told, just being with other folks who identify as Jews makes me feel Jewish. As an adult, sharing a meal and a bottle of wine with good friends who are Jewish is a relevant Jewish experience for me. While we might not be doing anything other than enjoying each other’s company, we share an unspoken bond. The sense of community we have passed down to our children has been nurtured by the welcoming communities at our various congregations. Our children love coming to the synagogue just so they can see their friends and take in the joy of Shabbat and other holidays.

In Memoriam
The following yahrzeits will be observed during the coming months:

August 30/31
Piba Bonder, aunt of Nora Keisman
Jeffrey Moses, brother of Ken Moses
Bernie Saul, uncle of Sherry Mencher
Sofya Shevelyova, mother of Alexander Levitin
Jerry Karver, brother in-law of Joan Karver
Lillian Ledeen, grandmother of Kathy DeLiema
William Gormin, uncle of Jeff Gormin
Esther Steinsapir, mother of Joan Rubel
Sylvia Farber, aunt of Sharon Devor
Laurene Hutson, mother of Gerene Levy
Rabbi Joseph Kalir*, father of Shula Kalir-Merton and grandfather of Orren Merton
Arnold Keats, brother of Mildred Levine
Selma Locke, mother of Honey Locke
William Smith, father of Cindy Greenberg
Joe Tawil*, father of Lara Engler and husband of Fortune Tawil
Rebecca Wall, mother of Nancy Blum
Maurice Westerman, father of Fay Zeramby
Bella Blake, mother of Debra Traub
Lawrence Cohen, grandfather of Beth Faskowitz
Marion Goldfader, grandmother of Michael Goldfader
Dorothy Kornbluh, mother of Wendy Rothenberg
Raymond Schatz, father of Miriam Harris
Rahel Shamas, mother of Albert Gazzar
Pearl Weinstein*, mother of Sandy Weinstein
Bernard Cooper, father of Peggy Skulsky
Elaine Rabe, aunt of Joanie Triestman

September 6/7
Irene Brass, aunt of Julia Ribak
Sol Cogan, father of Elinor Jacobs
Gerry Covey, father of Richard Covey
Judy Aronson, sister-in-law of Marla Greenwald
David Askin, father of Jerry Askin
Abraham Greenberg, grandfather of Deborah Green
Yvonne Grinberg, sister of Rosalind Gantman
Manny Needle, father of Geraldine Weiss
Elizabeth Pomush, grandmother of Bonni Pomush

“May their memories be for a blessing.”
Yahrzeits are observed at the Shabbat Service that falls on or before the anniversary dates.
*
/ ** In loving memory, a light will be lit on the Temple’s Memorial Board (* rotunda, ** chapel)