

(Note for web editions: Following is text without art of The Jewish Proclaimer, sent three times a year to almost all synagogues and some other institutions in the U.S., and some in Canada. The table of contents follows the print edition. The application form noted for page 7 may be called up separately on this website. The following is the third and last of three issues for 2002.)

No. 02 – 03

Autumn 2002 - 5763

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## MORE NEW YEARS – AND MORE JEWS

Every New Yea—and every new day—is an opportunity to do better.

For all concerned with Jewry’s future, every day’s a good time to think about what you can do to increase those prospects.

Judaism’s future is as a universal religion with a particular creed. Judaism needs to let people know they can become Jewish—just as they could and did 2000 years ago in the Roman empire.

We can’t take refuge in the excuse that present Jews must become “better” Jews before we can reach out to those not Jewish.

That means, among other things, that synagogues advertising for new members only in Jewish publications are engaged in self-cannibalization—a feeding frenzy in a small bowl, when there’s so much more world in the ocean outside.

Just advertising for members is not enough. We need to look for people who’d like to look into Judaism.

Jewish institutions need to let communities know their doors are open to anyone wanting to learn about Judaism.

The more Jews there are, the more Jews there are to be members of Jewish institutions.

At the same time, Jewish institutions can’t take their members—or their Jewish non-members—for granted. Don’t expect that Jews will belong to synagogues just because the synagogues exist. This creates for many Jews no obligation. Is your synagogue friendly? Does it ask what it can do for its members—or what its members can do for it? Especially, sorry to ask, are the rabbis friendly and present, or standoffish and absent? Cold synagogues make for cold ex-members.

You can’t assume that people census-counted as Jews are Jews. You don’t have to look far to see whole schools of Jews-by-inertia, sinking into the sea of anonymity.

The first commandment for this New Year:

Open our gates, and let more Jews come in.

## ADVERTISE YOUR WHEREAS. WE CAN HELP.

Let people in your community know that not only do you exist, you’re happy to tell them about Judaism.

A good way to do that is to advertise in your local (secular) media, welcoming people to your classes on Judaism. Make it easy for folk to call you and find out the details. You might be amazed to find out how many people in the general community don’t even know they can attend your services and classes.

We can help you with that advertising. After you’ve run your ads in your locality’s newspaper, or regional paper, or shoppers, or parents tabloid, or radio/tv about an Introduction to Judaism-type course, and the class has started, fill out our application form—on page 7 of this issue, and on the web at NCEJudaism.org—and send that to us with a copy of the ad or ads, and of the specific billing.

NCEJ will pay up to half the cost of that advertising, to a maximum of \$800, for each of two programs a year.

This does not include, of course, such advertising as membership, High Holy Day, Shabbat, Chanukah or Passover or the like—it's meant for courses, such as Taste of Judaism, that will attract people to learn about Judaism. Courses limited to interfaith are eligible for half the regular awards.

If you have an Open House Shabbat, where you explain your service after inviting all, and distribute material on your classes and on conversion, we'll subsidize those ads in the same way.

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## TUCSON: INFILL AND OUTREACH DRAW

Tucson—Temple Emanu-El (R) has grown from 350 to 700 families in the past 3 years. "Undoubtedly our outreach efforts have played a significant role," says Rabbi Samuel M. Cohon (520-327-4501).

"In a community that the Federation speculates has close to 40,000 Jews, we think it a tragedy that only a small fraction of them affiliate with congregations. We are also actively engaged in education programs that have led to approximately ten conversions a year." With addition of an assistant rabbi, the temple will be able to work with more conversion applicants.

Last year it taught 8 sections of the Taste of Judaism mini-course, with total enrollment 356. And 400 the previous year.

The temple also has a Simply Shabbat program, attracting about double the typical evening service of 200. Nonmembers were about 2/5 the attendance. This program was offered twice this past year. Pamphlets and information on classes or conversion were available. A question-and-answer session is part of the service.

Rabbi Cohon plans to increase advertising for these programs, and add ushers to help visitors. He advises others considering this: "Advertise in the secular press and have lots of handouts and places for people to register when they enter."

About a third of the students at the Taste classes were Jewish, a higher share than previously. Classes included lapsed Jews, people with a Jewish parent or grandparent but not Jewish, interfaith couples and non-Jewish partners, and non-Jewish lay and clergy.

Among comments:

"My second daughter is Jewish and is raising my granddaughter in this faith."

"I would be Jewish if I was not raised a Protestant."

"I know nothing about my Jewish heritage. My father was Jewish and my mother a converted Catholic. I married a Catholic & raised my children Catholic. Now I am interested in learning what my roots are."

"I've been wanting to learn more about Judaism for a few years and when I saw the ad in the newspaper I decided to 'just do it.'"

"You really enabled me to get into the ethos of Judaism, which makes so much more sense than Christianity ever has."

All students were invited for the High Holy Days and those who requested tickets received free ones.

As a result of the classes some 18 member units joined last year, it's estimated.

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## SANTA MONICA DRAWS 22 TO INTRO CLASS

Santa Monica—Beth Shir Shalom (R) attracts 22 to its Introduction to Judaism class, 70% nonmembers, 2/5 not Jewish. Five were interested in converting. Six conversions occurred at the synagogue in the past year. The 18-week class tuition was \$175/225.

Theme of its ad (displayed in the Proclaimer in the Summer 2001 issue) is: Come to explore/come to understand/come to enjoy!

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## CONVERSION ON THE WEB: TESTIMONIES

"I'm excited about the whole process of converting...thank you to everybody who has had a part in this website and helping me find Judaism." Mitchell, on ConversiontoJudaism.

"I am Mexican-American and have been wanting to convert for some time. My question is, since I am not 'white' will I still be accepted? Will I be made to feel unwelcome not only as a convert but also for my ethnic background?"—Sally.

"I converted because I am descended from a Portuguese Jew but through intermarriage we became Catholic even though on my mother's side we still kept some beliefs etc. I was baptized Catholic but not raised in the faith. I decided to try it out at college and I did not like it, then decided to read up on Judaism and I knew it was for me. I found a rabbi and I converted."—Nicole, on ChoosersJudaismEurope.

“When people ask me why did you convert I tell them the truth. I really felt like I had no choice, a little voice inside me drew me towards Judaism and though at times I tried to ignore it, it got louder and louder...Now I have peace, now I have courage, because now I am a Jew!”—Nigel, on Children-of-ruth.

“Is it so strange a conception that a gentile might want to identify with the Jewish people just as Jews wanted to identify with and support the black people during the civil rights marches of the 60s?...When I converted to Judaism it did not make any difference to me that I might suffer being part of the Jewish people. I was following God’s lead...There has to be something wrong with a Jew’s attitude when he can’t imagine why a gentile would want to become a Jew other than to marry a Jew. What a pathetic view of Judaism he must have...(A need to give priority to outreach to Jews) is the worst excuse of all for avoiding conversion outreach...Outreach to Jews without preparing for conversion is an invitation to maintaining intermarried couples in the synagogue and in fact encouraging intermarriage amongst the Jews already there....If you truly believe in Jewish outreach, you must also provide for conversion.”—Alex H.

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## **SPANISH SPOKEN HERE--BETH AM, MIAMI**

Miami—Temple Beth Am (R) maintains an ambitious program of outreach, in both English and Spanish.

It offers Understanding Judaism annually, in both. It’s had such positive results it’s offering an auxiliary High Holiday service in Spanish, says development director Amy Kossiver (305-667-6667x149). The first Friday each month there’s a Spanish Kabbalat Shabbat service. There’s a growing group of Spanish-speaking who want to learn more about Judaism, often involved in interfaith relationships.

Eighteen people, 15 of them not members, attended the 26-week Judaism course. Fees were \$250 single/300 couple, including materials.

It began a program last September, Chaver, mentoring for members new to Judaism. It had 3 conversions last year.

The temple has an elaborate, 40-page monthly bulletin, Commentator, which includes outreach information and testimony, and a page in Spanish.

Among comments:

“I recently completed my journey to Judaism and went to the mikvah—I could not be happier about my

faith in the Jewish people and religion and my commitment to my new faith and to Israel.”

“I could never have imagined that at age 36 my true destiny would reveal itself, and this Catholic girl from Kentucky would convert to Judaism and marry a Jewish man from Miami.”

“Every once in a while, someone comes up with a great idea. During Rosh haShonah services (5762) Rabbi Bookman put forth the idea of asking people to join our Jewish community...The last part of this idea offered up a ‘Jew in a Day’ concept. The gasp was audible...But I am here to tell you this is the greatest of notions. I am your ‘Jew in a Day,’ although it took me quite a lot of work to get to the day...This is a choice I have been in the process of making for almost eight years.”

“I did not want to convert for Michael, but for myself. Because although I was born to non-Jewish parents, I truly believe that I have a Jewish *neshoma*.”

“Invitations to participate or observe Temple events (Mitzvah day) could instill comfort levels that can’t quite be obtained from class attendance.”

“I told my sister about 2 months ago I was changing my religion but did not feel comfortable telling anyone else. Now I have told all my friends and they are very happy for me. In the future when I come to Beth Am I will be so happy to know I have some very dear friends here and I won’t feel alone.”

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## **EIGHTH ANNUAL GRANT TO TAMPA SHUL**

Tampa—Cong. Schaarai Zedek (R) wins a grant from NCEJ for the eighth year, for its continued good advertising of its course, Introduction to Judaism and Jewish spirituality.

We’ve carried a number of the ads. They’re worth repeating.

The temple had five conversions the past year—including one who took the course twice, to be sure, notes program director Sherry Stein (813-876-2377).

Attendance at the free 9-week course was 125,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them not members, half not Jewish.

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## **ATLANTA TASTE CLASS PULLS ALL JEWS**

Atlanta—While 8 of the 10 students at the Taste of Judaism 3-session free course at Temple Emanu-El were not members, all were Jewish, somewhat of a contrast to the usual attendance at these classes.

Still, the congregation was pleased. Reports Rabbi Julie S. Schwartz, “One participant...has al-

ready announced her intention to join the congregation... So we are delighted with the outcome!"

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## **NORTHEAST CONSERVATIVES WIN AGAIN**

Needham, MA—The Keruv of Conservative Judaism's New England region wins another NCEJ grant. This is for its First Steps, a 6-week introduction. 25 students attended the free course, half of them not Jewish.

This will be followed by a Next Steps course, says coordinator Judy Greene (617-964-0647).

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## **OMAHA TASTE CLASS ATTRACTS 143**

Omaha—All but 16 of the 143 people attending the Taste of Judaism mini-course offered by Temple Israel (R) this past winter were not Jewish, it reports.

Responding to a question about reasons for registering, 74 said they were curious, 9 were considering conversion, 4 were searching for a spiritual home, 3 had Jewish grandchildren.

Among comments:

"My son is going to marry a wonderful girl who is Jewish. I wanted to learn more about Judaism. I also teach a Bible study class in my church and wanted more information about Jewish faith and traditions."

"Cousin's family is Jewish, and other extended family members."

"Although my father and grandparents are Jewish, I was raised Catholic, with no exposure to Judaism."

"My oldest son married a Jewish girl and will have a Reformed Jewish family. He was married in a Temple and I'd like to learn about his wife's beliefs."

"Curiosity—if there are only 6,000 Jews in Omaha, I know 3,000 of them."

And afterwards:

"Judaism always seemed to be so secretive. In this class I learned what a wonderful way of life you have."

After taking this course, another says, "I feel welcome. I always felt the Jewish community was a closed community—that they did not want 'outsiders' around. I felt very welcome here."

"I am a divorced Catholic, whose church did not have a place for me. My husband now is Jewish, but not practising. I miss the spirituality."

"Having been raised a Catholic, Judaism would definitely be my second choice."

"I'm hoping the doors remain 'open.' I'm interested in learning more."

"I would like to continue to explore in more depth. I have always felt closer to Judaism than Christianity despite not being Jewish. What I have learned confirms my belief that I would make a good Jew despite my ethnic background."

"I want to learn more about Judaism. The class has also made me feel I want to convert."

"Thank you for being so welcoming—all staff and greeters. I am so impressed by your outreach to the community."

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## **LAS VEGAS FINDS TASTE CLASS GOOD BET**

Las Vegas—Four-fifths of Cong. Ner Tamid's Taste of Judaism class were not Jewish, reports assistant Rabbi Jennifer Weiner (702-733-6292).

"Most students are interfaith couples who are seeking a better appreciation of spouse's beliefs," she writes. "Many opted to enroll in a conversion class."

The temple is developing a four-part outreach program to enhance interfaith families' understanding of Shabbat and the festival holidays.

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## **UPPER NYACK—ADS ACCOUNT FOR HALF**

Upper Nyack, NY—Twentyfour of the 43 registering for the Taste classes at Temple Beth Torah (R) came from ads in 3 local newspapers. Nine attended only once. Of 23 surveyed, only a fifth were not Jewish, a contrast to most such courses. All students received brochures from local synagogues.

Among comments:

"I want my future children to be Jewish and I am very curious about the religion," says a non-Jew.

"I was so delighted that I was asked to join in the outreach service. It was so wonderful and the music was amazing. You made me feel so welcome and at ease!"

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## **WHAT A LITTLE CONGREGATION CAN DO**

Piqua, OH—A congregation of 25 families, Temple Anshe Emeth (R), shows what can be done in outreach. It has 25 members, including 3 convert families, and a number of interfaith.

It set out to hold a Taste of Judaism 3-class course, advertised in 5 newspapers and attracted 19, all but 2 not Jewish. Several wanted to connect with their Jewish family history.

The temple dates from 1858.

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## **SPECIAL OFFER ON SPECIAL BOOK**

Philadelphia—Rabbi Emeritus Henry Cohen of Beth David Reform Cong. wrote *What's Special About Judaism* in response to the needs of outreach

classes in the region. "Since using the book beginning the Fall of 2001 we have had very positive response," he writes.

He's willing to send complimentary copies to rabbis or other Jewish educators who would consider using it for outreach or other adult education.

Write the rabbi at 2308 N. 50<sup>th</sup> st., Philadelphia 19131. Email to Hedna@aol.com. Paperback, \$19.54.

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### **FLORENCE TASTE DRAWS DOZEN**

Florence, SC—Beth Torah Cong. (R) attracts a dozen to its Taste classes, ten of them not Jewish.

"We have people who are not Jewish and not related to any member of the congregation who worship with us on a regular basis," notes Rabbi Marc Kline.

### **VARIETY DOZEN AT FREDERICKSBURG**

Fredericksburg, VA—Among the dozen attending a 16-week Introduction to Judaism course at Beth Sholom Temple (R), reports para-rabbi Ronda Young, were:

One couple converting with their 3 children; one son of a Jewish father/Catholic mother converting, 3 long-time seekers probably converting, one messianic, 2 non-Jewish spouses raising Jewish children, one converting.

"My conversion to Judaism was not a condition of our marriage, for which I feel blessed, but she wanted to have a Jewish home and raise Jewish children...In late 1997, I started taking formal classes on Judaism. I still had no conscious desire to convert...

"I had found my way into a group of people who valued critical intellectual examination. There is no one required belief about God, God's nature or our relationship with God. There is also no one view of, or preoccupation with, what comes after the death of our physical bodies....

"Suddenly, all of my questions about religion, which had been very much unappreciated in Christianity, were very much appreciated. In fact, the one who questions is respected far more than the one who just goes along for the ride."—Wash. Post.

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### **WEB NOTES ON CONVERSION INTEREST**

From various websites on conversion:

"I have been interested in Judaism for over 25 years (I'm 41 now). Last year I approached a Reform rabbi in my search for conversion. But my wife became so upset that she told me to choose between her and Judaism. I stopped my official Jewish studies but

would still like to be Jewish. I don't know how to go about it though."—Ron.

"I am strongly considering converting to Judaism and am doing a lot of reading, and am trying to observe Shabbot and yom tov, and kosher. I haven't met with a rabbi yet (primarily because I live over an hour from the nearest Orthodox community and don't have a car.)"—Marta.

"I'm Barry, 30s, live on the English Riviera in South Devon. Raised RC, have loosely identified with the Unitarians, but have had a longstanding interest in Judaism. Considered converting but met with such stonewalling from Rabbis I approached. This seemed bizarre to me because I wanted to convert for spiritual reasons rather than any impending marriage to a Jewish woman."

"Although my father is Jewish, my mother was raised Baptist, & I was raised with some knowledge of both. I considered myself an atheist for a long time, until 2 things happened—I read *The Source*, by James Michener, and my Jewish grandmother passed away. I felt a connection and gained an awareness that I had never felt before."

"I can tell you that the process of conversion has brought me into a community, helped me connect with other people, consider some of the big questions of life, learn about culture, history, language, tradition and holidays."—Barbara.

"I was literally shaking when I went to Temple for the first time (was I dressed right, would I make a fool of myself, would I have to sit alone?)...all these questions and more were running through my mind. As it turns out, everyone was so very friendly and as soon as the service started, I felt completely at home even though I didn't understand a lot that was going on."

"Why did I become a Jew? One reason: In high school, I took a Holocaust studies class as a senior elective. Throughout the semester, I learned about the horrible things Hitler had done. He wanted nothing more than total annihilation of the Jewish people. I decided that Hitler could not be granted a posthumous victory if all the Jews assimilate into greater society and basically, I fell in love with the passion Jews have for life, for education, and for their relationship to G-d."—Elisheva.

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### **PROCLAIMER GOES TO OVER 3500 PLACES**

The Jewish Proclaimer is mailed to over 3,500 synagogues and other Jewish institutions in the U.S., and some in Canada. Individuals may receive its 3 issues a year with a donation to NCEJ. Remember,

you can see recent back issues' text on the web at  
[NCEJudaism.org](http://NCEJudaism.org).

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