

## Rabbi's Report –Board Meeting

March 16, 2017

- The directory is done!!!! Copies are being distributed as people come to Temple for various programs. An email has gone out letting people know that they can drop by at certain times to pick up their book.
- We had nearly 50 people attend our Family Shabbat/Shabbat Across America service on March 3. Hadassah Sabbath on March 10 involved a number of Hadassah members and supporters in leading our worship. The Mensch Club has approached me to take part in a Shabbat service at some point soon.



- The Purim Carnival and Dinner and Purim Shpiel brought a multi-generational crowd to Temple on March 11! Religious School students and parents prepared Mishloach Manot bags that were delivered to the homes of selected congregants on March 12.



- The series on the book WISE AGING concluded on March 8 and this year's series of the Judaism: Roots and Rituals class concluded on February 28.
- I led discussions at Temple on letters in the American Values/Religious Voices Campaign on March 7 and 8.
- I was a participant in a discussion of anti-Semitism during the Las Cruces



International Folk Festival on Thursday,

March 9 following the screening of the 1992 film, "School Ties." Actor Brendan Fraser, who starred in the movie, and Rabbi Bery Shmukler were the other panel participants.

- I am working with the Children's Chorus and our Adult Choir for the Jewish Food and Folk Festival. Initial rehearsals went well! I am working with Hubbard's music to procure a sound system for the event on April 23 (I was quoted \$100 for renting the system). I am grateful to several congregants who are going to loan us microphones for the day.
- I continue to convene a monthly Third Thursday clergy breakfast and serve on the NMSU Interfaith Council as Executive Advisor. I am taking part in a book discussion group on Dr. Jonathan Sarna's *American Judaism* once a week. The group plans to discuss a book on anti-Semitism as well.
- I am scheduled to perform an online concert on May 9, 2017 for "Harmony in Unison," an online anthology on Facebook of concerts organized by Jewish singer/songwriters Stacy Beyer and Beth Schafer. Facebook users can join the Facebook group to hear concerts from various performers 5 days a week.
- I will be attending the Central Conference of American Rabbis convention in Atlanta, GA on March 19-23. It will not involve a Friday night.
- My monthly article in the *Las Cruces Bulletin* on March 3, 2017 focused on the American Values/Religious Voices campaign. The February 24, 2017 issue of the *Las Cruces Bulletin* featured "Welcoming the Stranger: A Faith Statement" which I created along with Pastor Jared Carson and was approved by Bishop Oscar Cantu of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces and Radwan Jallad of the Islamic Center of Las Cruces. I submitted an op-ed to the *Las Cruces Sun-News* that will run soon that was sparked by a comment Brendan Fraser made about a scene in "School Ties. I related the scene to a passage from the book of Proverbs that has meaning for our time, or most any time.



Letter 52

AARON KOLLER

Associate Professor of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies

Yeshiva University

MARCH 12, 2017

Dear President Trump, Vice President Pence, Members of the Trump Administration and 115th Congress,

The great religions of the world have accumulated thousands of years of wisdom on the subject of leadership. Jewish texts speak often about power and its uses, and these texts continue to speak with a clear voice in the modern world.

A mishnah in Avot, a rabbinic text from nearly two thousand years ago, reflects on qualities that humans, especially elected officials, aspire to obtain: wisdom, power, and honor. The rabbis offer a paradoxical definition of these qualities: "Who is wise? One who learns from every person. Who is powerful? One who controls his impulses. Who is honored? One who honors all people" (Avot 4:1). True wisdom, power, and honor, the mishnah teaches, come from humility, openness, and self-control.

These lessons are echoed in modern studies of leadership. Contemporary research shows that leaders who know how to listen, respect others, and act with restraint can better bring people together and accomplish their goals. Daniel Goleman's classic article on leadership in the Harvard Business Review, for example, identifies empathy, social skills, and self-restraint as critical qualities for successful leaders.

The country is still hurting from a long and bruising campaign and a divisive start to a new administration. This has exposed deep divisions among our people. We need leaders who demonstrate these qualities:

- a willingness to listen to and learn from all people,
- the capacity to demonstrate power through restraint,
- and an ability to command honor and respect by doling out honor and respect to all those who deserve it.

We all yearn for leaders who exemplify these traits and can unify the country, bringing wisdom to a complex and challenging world. We hope and pray that your administration can succeed in bringing needed leadership in a complicated time. The teachings of our ancient texts can illuminate the way.

Sincerely,

*Aaron Koller*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Aaron Koller, Associate Professor of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University, studies the ancient world of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. His most recent book is *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). He has served as a Visiting Professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and he held research fellowships at the Albright Institute for Archaeological Research and the Hartman Institute.