

BETWEEN YOU AND ME: OUR STORIES

People often ask me what the process of conversion to Judaism is like at Temple Israel. I love when you ask this, because it gives me an opportunity to share what we do and give kavod (honor) to two of Temple Israel's most committed and exceptional teachers. This February marks the one-year anniversary of "Embracing Judaism," a course offered by master teachers Judy Bearman and Sally Rosenberg for those on a path of conversion to Judaism.



At any given moment, between 8 and 15 people in our community are pursuing conversion to Judaism. Some are in Jewish families already but have never officially become Jewish. Some have been followers of other faiths but have found that Judaism is a better fit. Some have never been religious until they encountered Judaism, and it moved something in them. As rabbis, we always have been honored to serve as counselors and mentors to these individuals as they make their way down this challenging and exciting path. But now, for the first time, we have been able to offer a class experience in addition to rabbinic counsel. As the first year of the class has come to a close, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The class will continue in a looping fashion, as new conversion students join and others, having completed their year-long course of study, participate in the rituals of conversion, including a beit din (a sitting with three knowledgeable Jews in which they explain their decision and learnings) and immersion in the mikvah.

"Embracing Judaism" has taught me a great deal as a rabbi. I have learned from each of the students how powerful the sharing of individual stories can be. I have been reminded of the completely essential nature of community and relationship as I observe members of this class supporting one another on their individual journeys toward Judaism. I have marveled at the commitment and wisdom of the teachers Sally and Judy, who are an embodiment of the truth that everyone's gifts are pivotal to the growth and strengthening of a community. Finally, I am reminded once again that more deeply engaging in one's Judaism is a satisfying, meaningful, and transformative experience. For some that may be coming to Temple when you didn't. For others, it means actively learning in addition to attending. For still others, it means teaching as well as attending and learning. For everyone, it means building a relationship to others in the community and to the tradition we share. I rejoice in the journey of self-discovery that Jews-by-choice in our Temple family are making every day, and I am grateful to each person who has been involved with "Embracing Judaism."

May you go from strength to strength.

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Katie Bauman

The process that led me to choose Judaism began over 30 years ago. My best friend of many years is Jewish, and I always have been exposed to and have been fascinated by Judaism. Twelve years ago I read *The Da Vinci Code*. Although I knew that the book was a work of fiction, it started me on a quest to discover the "truth" about Jesus. I read all of the source materials and came to the conclusion that I absolutely did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, but that I strongly believed in God.



For a number of years I didn't worship in any formal way. Due to my having many Jewish friends, I was exposed to and intrigued by Judaic traditions and beliefs. I began studying Judaism and concluded that the beliefs were in accord with my own beliefs. The importance of taking action particularly resonates with me. A couple of years ago a friend invited me to her Passover seder. I loved it. A few months later another friend invited me to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. I knew that I had found what I was looking for. I felt at home. I called Temple the next week to schedule an appointment with a Rabbi.

Temple Israel is such a special place. This is my first experience with an organization that is so warm and inviting. The genuine welcome that I have received from members has been amazing. Not one person has ever made me feel like an outsider. I have become involved in Sisterhood and God's Unfinished Business. Members of the Temple are lucky that there are a number of ways that people can jump right in and perform acts of service.

Judy Bearman and Sally Rosenberg, in conjunction with the clergy, have developed an amazing class for people who are choosing Judaism as a new way of life. The class involves learning the history, beliefs, and practices of Judaism, and it is so much more. As a class we were able to experience a Passover Seder, a Shabbat dinner, eating in a Sukkah, a Havdalah service, and we learned to prepare traditional Jewish dishes. Experiencing Jewish life inspired the entire class. We learned about the service opportunities at Temple and became involved. Judy and Sally poured their hearts into our class.

As a result of their dedication, lasting and deep friendships have been formed. Judy and Sally's class, "Embracing Judaism," helped make Judaism a part of who I am, and helped me find my home at Temple Israel.

L'Shalom,
Stacy Bendall