

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

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December 2006

Kislev / Tevet 5766

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## FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

A new and interesting demographic study of Greater Boston carried out by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute at Brandeis University has just been published, indicating that the number of Jews in the Boston area has actually increased, with the increase “fueled by an unexpectedly high percentage of children in mixed faith households being raised in the Jewish faith.” Similar findings have emerged from other such surveys in recent years.

I have never felt that Judaism needs to be a competitor in population growth races, yet I find these results very interesting. I also find it encouraging that they have been seized upon by Jewish community leaders in Boston to vindicate their efforts over the past decade to welcome and embrace interfaith families and to provide a hospitable climate for them.

The results also got me thinking - as we approach the Chanukah season – *why is this happening?* And one answer that comes to me loudly and clearly is that Judaism as we practice it at this time in America is so much about home and family.

- It's about rituals carried out within the family such as the lighting of Shabbat or Chanukah candles.
- It's about family gathering together for a Passover Seder.
- It's about bedtime prayers with the children.
- It's about B'nai Mitzvah kids going home on Monday evening, stimulated by the challenges of a Torah portion or by experiencing one of the mitzvot and brainstorming about it with the family over dinner.
- It's about the younger kids learning a new version of the Sh'ma with their friends, and wanting to sing it for their families.
- It's about the home rituals of mourning when we lose a loved one.

If indeed this is the case, I am confused by the efforts by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) and even by our own Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) to step up efforts to convert non-Jewish spouses in such families. With respect to non-Jewish spouses in interfaith households, the USCJ speaks of moving from *kerov* (to bring close; to welcome) to *edud* (urging). This *edud* initiative, the USCJ tells us, “must carefully craft a language that will encourage conversion.” Similarly, URJ President Rabbi Eric Yoffie (whom I have praised for other stances in earlier columns) wrote last year that the time has come “to reverse our message” and encourage conversion of such spouses.

Of course this “proactive conversion” posture by both the USCJ and the URJ stems from a concern with the survival of Judaism, a matter we do not take lightly and one touched upon by Rabbi Levine at our Dedication when he spoke about the unique challenge of American Judaism to remain vibrant and

alive without the cohesion that results from persecution and discrimination. And yet, I think “proactive conversion” misses the point – a point so well-illustrated by our own congregation with such a large number of fully functional interfaith families, my own included. Our interfaith families know something about the relationship of Judaism and family.

At the same time, these families know something about the importance of being part of a community like ours. These families actively participate, at least in part, because we’re a congregation of *kerov* and not *edud*, and because we respect, involve, and actively celebrate, as we did on the Bimah on Yom Kippur, non-Jewish parents of our Hebrew School students.

Our congregation will continue to provide safe opportunities to discuss the challenges facing interfaith families (e.g., isn’t an interfaith family an opportunity unto itself for the practice of *tikun olam* and the provision of an active counterweight to religious divisiveness in the world today?), while we continue to provide a space where the riches of our heritage can be shared by all who are interested.

B'Shalom,  
Jim

## **FROM YOUR PRESIDENT**

Dear Friends,

As I suggested in an earlier column, much has been accomplished during the past several months and there is much to reflect upon—dedication of our shul, annual meeting, high holidays, Sukkot, adult b’not mitzvah, dedication of a new Torah, and a significant increase in students enrolled in our Hebrew School.

It has been said that success sometimes buys an admission ticket to more difficult problems. Our Hebrew school meeting on Monday afternoons has become a somewhat crowded affair and we will be looking at the need to possibly change some practices. Perhaps it will be wise to have classes on two weekdays instead of one. We certainly will need to encourage next year’s registration at a much earlier date than we have in the past so we can figure out how to best accommodate our students in the limited space we have. In another area, our past practice has us doing our annual meeting, our Hebrew school registration and our high holiday services all within roughly the same time frame. As our high holiday services have become more and more successful, we will need to focus additional specific planning and energy on these services, so we will try to conduct the annual meeting and Hebrew school registration during the summer, when each can get the additional attention it requires .

Let me again urge those who have a desire to assist in the education efforts for our children to let us know. Our Education Committee welcomes parents and non-parents with ideas and energy, and it needs the creativity and volunteerism for which our community is known.

We have received much valuable feedback about our high holiday services. Some ideas, such as establishing in advance the actual time when the Yiskor service will begin on Yom Kippur, may be easy to implement. Other suggestions will be discussed over the next several months. The Board appreciates your suggestions and encourages your participation.

The success of moving into our own synagogue on our own property has opened many doorways, some into unexpected and unimagined realms. How do we best use our space? How do we keep it clean and in good repair? How do we sustain the effort to keep our space spiritual and available and busy and creative and grounded and caring and paid for and joyful? Success, at times, can bring with it such wonderful “problems” as these. Surely we will be able to communicate and work together to solve these wonderful problems.

B'Shalom,  
Paul



### **BAJC CHANUKAH GIFT SHOP**

The BAJC “gift shop” will have holiday items for sale in our synagogue on Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup> from 1:30 to 5:30--boxes of “regular” Chanukah candles for \$1, “decorator” candles ranging from \$5 to \$10 a box, cards for Chanukah and for other occasions, chocolate gelt, dreidels, and Judaica art gift items such as chanukiot, mezzuzot, Kiddush cups, and books of Jewish interest for children and adults. Most of the items are being offered at seriously discounted prices.

### **NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS**

This online copy of our newsletter is a much-reduced version of the real thing! The print version includes Honorable Menschen, Yahrzeits, and other individual member news. To help cover the costs of producing and mailing the newsletter, we ask that you contribute \$36 to BAJC for a subscription for the year 5767. Your subscription will include frequent e-mail updates. (If you want the newsletter but do not want to receive e-mails, please let Faith know.)

### **CALENDAR NOTES**

Please note that our schedule for services is a little different this month. Saturday morning Torah services will take place on the first and second Saturdays of the month, not the usual first and third. Usually on the second Friday night of the month, our potluck/Kabbalat Shabbat service this month will be on the third Friday night; it will be a gala Chanukah celebration AT WEST VILLAGE MEETING HOUSE, not at our shul. (See information elsewhere in the newsletter about this event.)

Our regular Monday night ma’ariv service will not take place on December 25<sup>th</sup> because we’ll all be at Faith and Abe’s house for a party. We hope several of you will make a special effort to attend ma’ariv services on all the other Mondays because we have members who need to say Kaddish, and a minyan is required for that prayer. Notice also that BAJC activity does NOT cease during the winter vacation week.



## **NER SHEL TZEDAKAH - December 20th**

Ner Shel Tzedakah (“candle of righteousness”) is a project in which your family takes the sixth night of Chanukah to learn about the problem of poverty and donates the value of the gifts they would have given that night (or the gifts themselves) to organizations that assist the poor. This year, the sixth night falls on Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. For a special blessing for this project and your family or for additional information, go to: [www.urj.org/csa/projects/](http://www.urj.org/csa/projects/) .



## **FIRST NIGHT BAJC CHANUKAH CELEBRATION AT WVMH**

BAJC will usher in Chanukah 5767 at its Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat service on December 15<sup>th</sup>, the first candle of the eight-day holiday. The festivities will be held at the West Village Meeting House, beginning with a latke potluck supper at 5:00. Everyone is asked to bring enough pre-cooked latkes for twelve people, along with some finger-food dessert. Applesauce and sour cream, coffee and tea, will be provided. Latkes can be warmed in the oven in the West Village kitchen. Bring your menorahs and candles; after supper we will light candles and have a family-friendly Kabbalat Shabbat/Chanukah service, followed by a special treat—a one-hour concert of Chanukah and other Jewish music performed by Mark Levy.

A cantorial soloist in California, Mark Levy is a singer-songwriter who has performed for Jewish groups throughout this country and abroad. Pete Seeger said of him, “Mark is inspiring. I don’t often hear someone with such a good voice and clear sense of direction.” With an Askenazi mother and a Sephardi father (a mixed marriage?), Mark combines the beautiful melodies of both traditions, along with Hebrew and Israeli songs and satirical songs of his own. Accompanied by guitar and dumbek in what is sure to be a concert enjoyable for all ages, his “Oy, Chanika!” program will include songs sung in Yiddish, Ladino, Hebrew, English, and Russian, with an emphasis on audience participation.

## **BOOKS AND MUSIC FOR CHANUKAH**

*The Chanukah Activity Book* by Judy Dick is the way that Chanukah was meant to be celebrated—overflowing with games and activities to use during the Festival of Lights. *Chanukah on the Prairie* written by Burt E. Schuman and illustrated by Rosalind Charney Kaye, introduces a little-known slice of American Jewish history to children, following the Eastern European Jews who choose to settle the Wild West. Visit [www.urjpress.com](http://www.urjpress.com) today to for these or other books about this holiday and other areas of interest.

Go to [www.soundswrite.com](http://www.soundswrite.com) for a comprehensive collection of Jewish music for Chanukah and for all times.

## WELCOMING NON-JEWISH MOTHERS

Free and open to the public, “Welcoming Non-Jewish Mothers,” is the topic of a discussion led by Christine Benvenuto about the role of gentile women in the Jewish community over the centuries. Christine has authored books (*Shiksa: the Gentile Woman in the Jewish World* and *Not-So-Jewish Mothers*), and has had essays, articles, stories and reviews in many national publications. The program will take place on Thursday evening, December 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 in the Lilly Library Meeting Room at 19 Meadow Street in Florence, MA. Call the library at 413-587-1500 for directions; call 413-439-1946 for more information about the program, sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation and the Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts.

## B'NOT MITZVAH NOTES

Thank you for the immeasurable outpouring of support that I felt at our B'not Mitzvah, which helped to make October 14th the most meaningful day of my life since the birth of our daughter Alana ten years ago. Many guests not familiar with our congregation noted the feeling of warmth and community that characterized the day. I feel very blessed on many levels and am so grateful to you all for your part in making this journey such a wondrous one. Thank you, too, for the beautiful kiddish cup, which sits with the special Shabbat candlesticks that my dearest high school friend gave me to commemorate the event. Kim

It was an amazing experience to look out at everyone at our group Bat Mitzvah: my family, children, close friends, and BAJC members all there as witnesses and participants in what was way more meaningful and powerful an experience than I ever imagined it would be. I so appreciate all the effort of so many people in large and small ways that made it happen and made it a collage of community and spirit, grace and song, new and ancient. I thank you with all my heart. Judy

I want to thank all of you for your support, for your interest, for your enthusiasm and for your participation in our b'not mitzvah.. I continue to feel humble about the response we have all received. I guess because this journey has been so personal, I never expected it to be so publicly celebrated; it has been wonderful, even if a bit overwhelming at times.

When I first began studying with my friends, it was only because I felt like I had missed out when I was a teenager. Watching my three children prepare for their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs reinforced this feeling. In studying for my own bat mitzvah, I have gained in knowledge, in spiritual awareness, in social conscience and in friendship; I have grown as a woman, a Jew, a wife and mother, as a daughter, sister and friend.

Thank you to everyone for making this possible, for creating an environment where I felt safe to take the first step. I feel so blessed to be a part of this community. And to Judy, Deb, Kim and Janet – our journey continues! Vikki



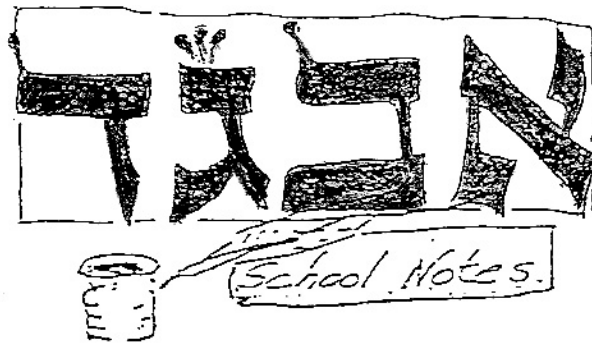
## CLASS GIFT

The b'nai mitzvah class of 5766 decided that instead of giving each other bar/bat mitzvah gifts, they would get together to buy a gift for BAJC instead as a way of celebrating becoming adults in the congregation. After considering many ideas, they decided to give a picnic table we can use and enjoy on the beautiful grounds surrounding our shul. Thanks to Jake, Kim, Jacob and their families for this

wonderful gift. This is a first for our congregation and perhaps will serve as an example for other classes in the future.

## PRAYER BOOK UPDATE

Oh woe! The first printing of *Mishkan Tefilah*, the new Reform siddur, was a disaster! The entire run of 100,000 copies came out far below what URJ considered acceptable standards and the whole project has to go “back to the drawing board,” eventually to be reprinted. This means we will not be getting our copies for a while but, looking on the bright side, the delay will give you more time to make a donation for the new prayer books so that when the books arrive a bookplate can be placed in each prayer book inscribed with a donor’s name and the names of those to whom the book is dedicated. The cost of donating a prayer book is \$36. You can donate as many as you want, all dedicated to the same person or each to a different person. Simply send a check to BAJC, along with a note indicating the names you want on the bookplate and whether it is “in memory of...” or “in honor of...”. Call Faith if you have any questions about this.



Hebrew School is hard. For a child to sit in a classroom and study a new and difficult language after he or she has already spent many hours meeting the demands of secular school is a tremendous challenge. Yet, it is a challenge that our kids (*your kids!*) meet each week with energy and joy. At the Hebrew School Shabbat last month, not only did the kids get a chance to show off a small portion of what they have been learning this year, they also filled our sanctuary with that same joyful energy that I have come to expect every Monday afternoon when we come together to sing and learn.

One parent wrote, “The Friday night service and potluck has long been a favorite of mine and last Friday’s topped any I have been to. Wouldn’t it be great if every Friday night service could be like that?” I think they could be. As our services tend to be informal, and as Jim *always* tells a story on Friday nights, I sincerely hope that Hebrew School families will continue to attend any and all the services that fit into their schedules.

If you and your children are unable to join us to welcome Shabbat, your kids are fully prepared and able to lead the family at home. Just pick up a Shabbat Kit at Hebrew School on Monday. The kit contains two candles wrapped in a copy of the blessing (English, Hebrew, and transliterated Hebrew) It’s easy: just light the candles, say the blessing, then hug and kiss everyone. It’s a great start to the weekend.

B’shalom,  
Mara

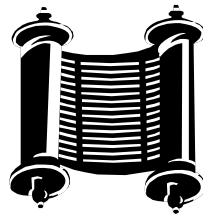
## THANK YOU (4<sup>TH</sup> EDITION)

This is a special “thank-you” to acknowledge those of you who have so kindly paid dues for the whole year in one lump-sum payment, and to heartily thank those of you who have so generously paid MORE than the basic dues. Although we appreciate everyone’s dues payments, whenever they

come in, lump-sum payments make our record-keeping so much easier and, of course, provide the “up-front” money we need to pay our expenses as they occur. People who so generously pay more than the basic dues allow us to continue our policy of welcoming everyone, regardless of ability to pay, and also help us provide much-needed scholarships for Hebrew school.

In addition, thank you to those of you who support our congregation by making donations in honor of special events in your lives and in memory of family and friends lost recently or in the past. Yahrzeits, birthdays, births, anniversaries, graduations, promotions, kind deeds done for you, and other events can be recognized by a donation to any of our funds, including the newly-established capital fund. A card will be sent acknowledging your donation if it is made in honor of, or in memory of, someone.

A very special thank you to Felipe for building a framework we can use every year for our sukkah, and for installing a new door on the BAJC office, which we can now actually lock! Thanks also to Johnny Lee for fixing the cracked storm windows in the office.



## **THURSDAY MORNING PRAYERS**

Start your day out right. Join us for Shacharit prayers on Thursday mornings, 7:30 am at the shul. All are welcome. Bring t'fillin and a tallit if you wish, or a favorite morning prayer or song, or just bring yourself. Come late, leave early, plug in where you can. This will be a very relaxed, joyous celebration of a new day. Nice alternative (or addition) to your usual coffee and donuts. Questions? Contact Johnny Lee by phone at (802) 254-4609 or by email [peacedog@verizon.net](mailto:peacedog@verizon.net). Although we will probably never have daily morning and evening prayers (shacharit and ma'ariv) in our shul, we can take a small but meaningful step in that direction with ma'ariv on Mondays at 6:00 (after Hebrew school) and now with shacharit on Thursday mornings at 7:30. Both are short services, taking no more than a half-hour. You can join us once in a while or regularly. Praying in community, however informally, will give you a very good feeling—a good way to start or end the day!

## **Hebrew Immersion Weekend for Adults in Wisconsin**

Ever wanted to go back to Hebrew school as an adult? Think you could have a good time at camp again? If you said yes, Chalutzim for Adults is the program for you. At Chalutzim for Adults, January 11

-14, 2007 at the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute in Wisconsin, you get a taste of Hebrew immersion. You'll spend a fabulous weekend of Hebrew language, learning, and song with Rabbi Michael Weinberg and Rabbi Steven Bob. For those who have some Hebrew facility. For additional information, please visit the OSRUI website: [www.osrui.org](http://www.osrui.org) or email [osruiprograms@urj.org](mailto:osruiprograms@urj.org).

## **Attention Bike Riders! Support Reform Judaism by Biking in Israel**

Imagine biking from the Dead Sea to the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean...all while raising money to benefit Israeli Reform Judaism. The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism invites members of Reform communities from around the world to participate in its 4th annual Ride4Reform fundraising bike tour in Israel from March 18-22, 2007. The Three Seas Ride will encompass the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. For more information please visit [www.riding4reform.org](http://www.riding4reform.org) or email [riding4reform@impj.org.il](mailto:riding4reform@impj.org.il) with any questions.

## BAJC Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide a context and structure for people to be Jewish together in a rural environment. This community fosters Jewish pride and identity by participating together in religious, spiritual, educational, social and cultural experiences. We welcome anyone interested in participating and learning.

## BAJC DIRECTORY

**Spiritual leader:** James Levinson

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