

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



## The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

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January 2007

Tevet / Shevat 5767

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### FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

At this writing, Louise, Dora and I are preparing to leave for India and Nepal where we'll meet up with Noah and spend several weeks together (returning to Vermont in mid-January). While there, we'll have a chance to assess programs addressing HIV/AIDS. We'll also visit Noah's "Calcutta Kids" programs for street children and for pregnant women and infants in the slums of that city. Right now Noah is developing a health insurance scheme for slum families – something most of us take for granted, but an absolutely huge opportunity for these families who are so vulnerable to the immense consequences of illness.

The time I spend working in Asia and Africa keeps me keenly aware of deprivation in the world, of injustice, and also of the enormous disparities in incomes and access to services. I'm therefore particularly pleased to be part of a congregation that is so creative and so generous in helping to meet these needs, both locally and internationally.

Lots of examples:

- On Yom Kippur this year, and again at Thanksgiving, we continued our tradition of making substantial contributions of non-perishables and warm clothes to our Brattleboro Drop-In Center.
- Our B'nai Mitzvah class is entering into pen pal relationships with Israeli and with Palestinian teenagers, and will likely become involved with them in development of social service projects.

- Our congregation is a founding member of the Brattleboro Interfaith Initiative, rapidly becoming an important social action vehicle in our community.
- Last month our congregation responded immediately and generously to an emergency need facing a local family.
- During the Chanukah season, we made available energy efficient light bulbs which have such potential in helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Individuals in our community continue to be actively involved in projects in Nicaragua, Argentina, Cuba and elsewhere which are helping to meet basic needs while raising awareness of injustice issues.

Additionally, how about this proposal now under discussion – a series of monthly "coffee houses" on a broad array of social action topics to educate and inspire us, while giving us the opportunity to help out with our brains, our hands or our pocket books?

Such activity makes it all the more a privilege to be part of our congregation.

As we say so often to our children: engaging compassionately in social action, helping the disadvantaged, working for justice, and cleaning up our planet are the very best ways available to us to partner with God in helping to complete the as yet incomplete creation of the world.

B'Shalom,  
Jim

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

I am reminded in many ways of the value of having established community space at our synagogue, not only for important and advertised events, but also for the small and unnoticed. A quick read of our webpage shows the variety of scheduled events, utilizing our space many days of most weeks. This is something new for us, as we were limited in what we could do when we rented space at West Village.

I was reminded of the importance of having a community place when I stopped by our synagogue in mid-December to buy some Chanukah cards on a quiet Wednesday afternoon. As I came into our synagogue, I heard the clicking of tiles and the sounds of laughter and talk. There they were - four or five of our most active members, gathered around a table, playing mah-jongg. I was aware that these ladies have been playing together for some time and I assumed that they met at each other's homes but as I looked over the Chanukah items and listened to these friends chat, I was pleased that they had chosen to meet and spend time together at our synagogue. I have been told the story that my parents first met each other by chance on a bus in Washington DC in the mid-1940's, each on the way to the Jewish Community Center! Just goes to show that these centers are important to Jewish people for making all kinds of connections. I hope that more groups will use our synagogue for informal get-togethers. Just remember please to check with Faith, keeper of the calendar for building use, to avoid conflicts

As part of developing communities within BAJC, a number of women are planning now for a BAJC Women's Group, which is expected to feature services, celebrations, pot lucks, and other special events. See the questionnaire in this newsletter to learn how you can be part of this new and important effort.

We are also reminded that creating community means reaching out to others. I am pleased to note that our recently established Gemillut Chesed fund to help families in need has received an impressive number of donations, both large and small, in response to just one e-mail sent out early in December. Jim Levinson, the administrator of the fund, can most easily be reached at [jim@bajcvermont.org](mailto:jim@bajcvermont.org) with questions or requests. Donations are welcome any time, whether to be used for this one particular family or for others in need.

Finally, at our last Board meeting, we agreed upon several changes in our annual calendar. Most importantly, we have decided to move our Hebrew School registration to coincide with the ending of the school year. If we can get students registered in the Spring, we can do better planning in the Summer in advance of school. We will be asking all of you to let us know of new potential students who might want to attend our Hebrew school next year. We will also be having the Annual Meeting in mid-summer, so the budget and other matters can be dealt with in advance of the end of our fiscal year and prior to the busy-ness of the fall holidays. More information about both changes will be forthcoming.

A happy (secular) new year to all. May all your resolutions, which hopefully may include or require spending time at our own Jewish Community Center, be achieved.

B'Shalom,  
Paul

## SEMINAR FOR LAY LEADERSHIP IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

If you've ever wanted to lead services, conduct a baby naming, or help lead your congregation in other ways, why not apply for this summer's *Had'rachah* seminar in synagogue skills? This intensive and comprehensive program will take place at the URJ Kutz Camp in Warwick, NY, from May 9-15, 2007. For more information please call 212.650.4193 or send an email to [worship@urj.org](mailto:worship@urj.org).

## WORKSHOP FOR SYNAGOGUE MUSICIANS

"Why is this *Mishkan T'fillah* different from all other books?" asks the wise and some-what confused songleader. Well you do not have to wait for Passover to get the answers. Join hundreds of other songleaders, singers, cantors and other musicians at the Regional Workshops for Synagogue Musicians to explore the new aspects of *Mishkan T'fillah* and the ways to incorporate music into Shabbat services. Learn more online at [www.urj.org/worship/musictraining/](http://www.urj.org/worship/musictraining/) or by contacting [worship@urj.org](mailto:worship@urj.org).

## 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.)

## ADULT EDUCATION AT BAJC

BAJC's Adult Education program puts the responsibility for our Jewish learning in our own hands. We rely on people in our congregation to develop a Jewish learning environment where we join together to celebrate all aspects of Jewish life. We want to offer classes and events which invite participation by both members and non-members and we encourage people to share their knowledge or to explore areas of interest by offering to teach a class. Our congregation will be enlivened by studying, dancing, meditating, praying, learning and celebrating together. Let us know your suggestions for courses or events that interest you and about your willingness to teach a class or lead a monthly event.

The courses listed here will be presented IF there is adequate registration. Please phone 802.257.1959 and leave a message on the adult education voicemail to ask questions or to register, or you can register online at [www.bajcvermont.org](http://www.bajcvermont.org). The fee for courses for non-members is \$10- \$30, based on the length of the course. There is no fee for BAJC members.

**Decoding Hebrew:** a course to learn to read Hebrew. 10 Wednesday evenings, beginning January 17th, at 6 pm (time negotiable). If you don't know an aleph from a bet and would like to be able to read Hebrew, this class, taught by Faith Schuster, is for you. In ten sessions, you will learn to decode Hebrew letters, put sounds together, and read the prayers and songs in our siddur. You will learn some vocabulary and a tiny bit of grammar, but the emphasis is on reading prayer-book Hebrew. (This class is NOT about modern conversational Hebrew.) A \$20 book purchase is required.

**Basic Judaism:** Sundays, February 11th, 18th, 25th, March 4th and 11th, 5 – 6:30 pm. Taught by Jim Levinson, this high energy, discussion-based series provides a basic introduction to Jewish philosophy

and observance and includes the following topics: belief in God, prayer, the Sabbath, Jewish observance, life style and social action.

**Judaism's Storytelling Treasury:** Sundays, February 11th and 25th, 3 – 5 pm. Taught by David Arfa, these two classes will explain what Midrash is and where all those stories are from; what you find inside the ancient books of Torah, Talmud, Midrash, or Zohar; how are these books connected with the oral tradition. The classes will range from the ancient world to contemporary life, explore mythology and mysticism, and provide bibliographies and sample stories.

## Ongoing Monthly Drop-In Classes

(no registration necessary)

**Singing is Like Praying Twice,** on the last Thursday evening of each month, shows the joyous path to Jewish worship through song. Organized by Allen Ross and Andi Waisman.

**Israeli Folk Dance** is led by Judith Reichsman and Deb Hall on the first Saturday of the month, 4:00 – 5:00 p.m..

**Jewish Meditation and Mysticism,** organized by Michael Knapp, meets on the second Saturday of each month at 4:30 p.m. Sessions include a short Havdalah service, a meditation practice, and an exploration of Jewish mysticism in an effort to find what practice is best for each of us. This once-a-month class is perfect for those who have not meditated before and are curious about Jewish meditation and mysticism or those who want to work with a group to practice meditation more regularly. The January 13<sup>th</sup> session will be led by guest expert Rhonda Shapiro-Rieser.

**Torah Study:** Torah provides a spiritual anchor as each week we read a segment to understand the literature in its historical context and also to derive wisdom that intersects our own life and experience. Led by Marty Cohn on some of the Saturday mornings when we do not have a service, Torah study dates will be on the newsletter calendar. Next Torah Study will be January 27.

## GO TO ISRAEL!

There is a flyer in this newsletter about a pilgrimage to Israel in March, sponsored by our URJ-Northeast Council. If you can consider going on this trip, consider also the strong possibility that the Grinspoon Foundation will give you an incentive grant of \$1000 toward the trip! Contact Faith Schuster for more information, or go to [www.hqf.org](http://www.hqf.org)

and click on incentive grants, then Israel Travel and Study, for an easy-to-fill-out application. The website says for “western Massachusetts” but the Foundation has generously expanded its services to our area. Faith and Abe have already received incentive grants and have made their reservations for this trip. They would be delighted if others in our congregation would join them.

## **NEW: PROGRAMS FOR BAJC WOMEN**

Thank you to everyone who responded so quickly to the e-mail questionnaire about women's programming. The responses so far indicate interest in this idea. We are including a hard copy of the questionnaire in this newsletter for those who do not receive e-mail. Please complete it and send it to: Yael at PO Box 2353 Brattleboro, VT 05303. We will be holding a planning meeting at the shul on Sunday afternoon, January 7, at 3:00. If you are interested in helping to develop women's programming come to this meeting

We would like to begin with a Rosh Chodesh group, which will meet in homes. The first one will be held on Monday, Jan. 15, from 3-5 p.m. at Susan's home; the next will be held on Sunday, Feb. 18, 3-5 p.m., Thursday, March, 15 from 6-8 p.m., and Sunday, April 15th, 3-5 p.m., locations to be announced. We also plan to host a Women's Seder in March--an educational program based on a feminist Haggadah. Last year the first Women's Seder had a very good response; we hope to see more of you this year.



There is an easy way to raise money for BAJC just by searching the Internet. It's simple. You use [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com) just as you would Google or any other search engine — the site is powered by Yahoo!. Each time you use it, money is generated for BAJC because GoodSearch directs part of its advertising revenue to charities—one of which is BAJC! We just received our first check from GoodSearch--a small one because too few of us are using this philanthropic search engine, but if all our members and friends would take advantage of this easy fundraiser we could earn lots of money. The first time you go to [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com), type “Brattleboro Area Jewish Community” into the “I support “ box and click on ‘verify’. Once you are

registered, every time you click on GoodSearch.com (instead of Google or any other search engine), we will get one penny. Those pennies will add up fast! If you're interested, you can keep track of our earnings by clicking on “amount raised” once you have designated us as your organization of choice; you also can download a GoodSearch toolbar from their homepage so that you will not have to type the name in every time. We hope that you will use GoodSearch as your main search engine from now on, and that you will pass this message on to your friends and family. The more people who use GoodSearch, the more money will go to BAJC.

## **AND SPEAKING OF FUNDRAISING...**

The Chanukah holiday sale organized by Marty Cohn and Faith Schuster was a very successful event. Members and non-members, Jews and non-Jews, were able to find items they needed for Chanukah supplies and gift-giving. We sold many boxes of candles and bags of Chanukah gelt (chocolate coins), books both new and used, and other one-of-a-kind Judaica. When all the bills are paid, we will have netted more than \$700—and we still have some things to sell. Unfortunately, we don't have the space for a permanent gift shop, but you can see these items by appointment with Faith.

All our fundraising efforts take time, energy, and commitment from volunteers. Special thanks for this fundraiser go to Marty and Faith, and also to Jennifer and Joe, Esther, Yael, Selma, Susan, Vikki, Eva, Sandra, Bobbe, Abe, and Deb, Amie, and Kellie.

We hope to have the used book sale as an ongoing fundraiser, with a “buck-a-book” bookcase, an ever-changing library from which you can select any time the shul is open; just leave your dollars in the container atop the bookcase. You can also bring in good “pre-read” books, a few at a time, that you would like to leave for others to read. Children's books in good condition are welcome, but no textbooks or reference books, please, and no torn or badly-worn books.

## **SJBC**

The Significant Jewish Books Club is reading *In the Shadow of the Ark* by Anne Provoost for its January 31st meeting. The Club meets every other month and is open to new members all the time. You can participate to discuss any one book, or all the books, or to make suggestions for the next choices of books to read. If you'd like to join us for potluck dinner and discussion of the book, please contact Faith.

## **LOTS OF LATKES, PLUS**

BAJC welcomed Chanukah this year with a latke potluck, a Kabbalat Shabbat service, and a charming concert by Mark Levy, a Jewish folksinger/musician from California. A large turnout of parents, grandparents, and kids—way more than our small shul could have accommodated!--filled our former home, West Village Meeting House, to light candles together and feast on latkes of all shapes and sizes (along with other good foods), and to sing along with Mark Levy. All in all, it was a bright and joyful evening. We hope that all the Chanukah wishes we shared come true!

It took a passel of hard-working Chanukah elves to plan, set up, serve, and clean up for this event. Heartfelt thanks go to Laura and Patrick; Faith, Abe, and David; Marty, Yael, and Jessica; Esther; Julie, Stuart, Louisa, and Susanna; Judy; Laura; Norma; Rick and Elaine; Mara; Moss, Eric; and other helpers whose names we might have missed.

## **SCHOOL NOTES**

The month of Kislev arrived at Hebrew School with great fanfare. A highly unscientific poll of our students determined that Chanukah is the favorite holiday of 72.6% although, as the 25<sup>th</sup> drew near, even those who purported to be fans primarily of Purim or Pesach were caught up in the Chanukah excitement. Along with Chanukia lighting skills (candles added from right to left but lit from left to right), the kids have mastered several dreidel spins: "The Classic," "The Inverted," and the new and difficult "Recumbent Start" or "Idelkope Variation." "The Aerial," while effective and dramatic, has been banned for reasons of safety.

Beyond mastering the recumbent start, I see Chanukah as holding a particular challenge for rural Jews and, based on my conversations with many parents over the last few weeks (both serious and humorous), I know that I am not alone. While Chanukah is a minor festival, its juxtaposition with Christmas makes this a time of year when our children seem most likely to ask us about the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish beliefs. In addition, this is also when gentiles express similar curiosity. I have tested out a number of answers from lengthy to flip, and most recently have settled on the simple explanation that those who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah are Christian, while the Jews are still waiting for the messiah. ("I don't believe in Jesus," my friend's daughter told her, "Does that mean I'm Jewish?").

Both the Dalet and Gimmel classes have spent some time on this question in the time before the holidays. That most of the families in our congregation are interfaith, and that many celebrate both holidays, made these discussions more challenging and interesting and, as in all things quintessentially Jewish, generated more questions than answers.

B'shalom,  
Mara

## 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

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