

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

February 2007

Shevat / Adar 5767

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

During the past 20 years, there's been an exponential increase in archeological research shedding light on the "facts" of the Biblical period. Not surprisingly, the research casts doubt on the historical basis for large portions of Hebrew Scripture – including the Exodus itself and the Davidic kingdom. There is, in fact, an essay summing up some of this recent research in the Conservative Movement's *chumash*, "Etz Chaim." Happily, this kind of evidence doesn't make much difference to most of us. The episodes of the Tanach provide us with what we think of as "mythic truths," sources of deep wisdom that continue to have relevance for us today, and they constitute the heart of our religious heritage.

Problems do occur, however, when individuals and religious institutions take all of scripture literally without looking at its deeper meaning. Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal, Dean of the Torah Academy of Long Island, has documented some of the problems that arise when Yeshiva students take literally the *midrashim*, believing, for example, that the arm of Pharaoh's daughter grew to 25 feet in order to bring to shore the basket with baby Moshe, or that a single huge frog emerged from the Nile to cover Egypt. (Maimonides and the Talmudic sages are unequivocal in indicating that the *midrashim* are not to be taken literally – indeed that doing so would distort one's basis for belief.)

The same concerns, of course, arise when Christian fundamentalist groups take scripture literally without looking for its underlying meaning. We are well aware of the consequences of such Christian groups taking the creation story literally and opposing the teaching of evolution in schools. More recently a literal

interpretation of the Christian Book of Revelation – again with no understanding of its real meaning – has led to a series of best selling books, films and now video games under the title of *Left Behind*. Their basic idea is that as we approach the "end time," true Christians will be "raptured" – taken up to heaven, while the rest of us are "left behind." What ensues is a seven year war (providing the "thriller" basis for the books and films) between "the tribulation force," (those Christians who now "see the light") and "the bad guys" (influenced by liberals, the U.N., and the like).

Many persons of faith, including large numbers of Christians as well as Jews and Muslims, not surprisingly, have been disturbed by the "Left Behind" phenomenon and particularly by its potential effect on the younger generation – witness the effort by responsible Christian groups to get Walmart to stop selling the "Left Behind" video games. In the same vein, an effort is underway to create a graphic novella to be entitled *Left Behind and Doing Fine Thanks- A Fable*, which Rabbi Michael Lerner has offered to publish in *Tikkun Magazine*. Among other things, this work, humorous yet respectful, will portray the social progress and interfaith cooperation that becomes possible when Christian conservatives are out of the way – progress ultimately convincing even to the reactionary forces.

The recent U.S. election has been a rebuke of sorts to the intrusion of fundamentalist Christianity into governance. At the same time, we need to keep watch and respond to the threats and consequences of fundamentalist religion wherever it occurs.

Let those of us who genuinely value free religious expression and hate to see it used in ways that

increase fear and distrust between religious communities, assume this responsibility.

B'Shalom,
Jim

FROM YOUR VICE PRESIDENT

Shalom Chaverim,

In the last few months, I've made three visits to Springfield MA on Jewish "business" --once to attend the inspiring weekend-long URJ Regional Biennial conference, and twice to meet with people from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. These rich experiences have had a profound effect on me: they made me realize we, as Jews, are isolated and secluded in ways I had not intended nor thought about. Many of us have chosen to live in Vermont to be closer to values and lifestyles unattainable among the skyscrapers, strip malls and competitive bustle of suburban and urban life. I find it irksome when visiting friends balk that there's no Starbucks in town, or poke fun that we don't have a traffic light in Putney because I know our lack of urban trappings is not an indicator of lack of cultural richness, but I recognize that we are, perhaps, isolated Jewishly. I participate in many of the things that make our Jewish community as vibrant as it is--I go to services, I spend time with my kids at Hebrew School, I sit on the Board and the ritual and fundraising committees, I read the daily *Ten Minutes of Torah* emails (along with a plethora of other Jewish-content emails). Judaism is a huge part of my life, so it had never occurred to me that we are indeed isolated until my recent visits to little Springfield MA.

The Biennial was amazing: there were cantors and rabbis everywhere, and the singing was almost constant—hundreds of New Englanders singing songs I know to tunes I'd never heard. It was like summer camp. On Friday night we filled Sinai Temple with busloads of people (and I'm pretty sure *they* have a kitchen in which even our two Sharons would enjoy cooking). On Saturday and Sunday we had wonderful meetings and meals together. I remember thinking I need to make kibbitzing with this many Jews happen more often in my life—my kids have no idea, and I forgot, how great it is to be surrounded by Jewish people.

My recent visits with Faith, Abe, and Paul to the Grinspoon Foundation took place on the large JCC campus, which includes a preschool, a day school, the Resource Center for Jewish Education, a beautiful Judaica shop, and so forth. On both visits, we were joined by Bennington's new rabbi, Josh

Boettinger. It struck me that I've not been to a service in Bennington in the 16 years I've been in the Brattleboro area, and when I thought about what the most significant benefit to us would be should HGF open their programs to us in southern Vermont, I realized it was the broadened Jewish connections we would make as a result. We might be more likely to organize a shabbaton in conjunction with Bennington, Keene, or Greenfield (maybe led by one of our member college students?), to take our teens on a Jewish trip to NYC, to send our kids to Jewish summer camps, to work with the HGF educators as a resource in our own curriculum planning, and who knows what else.

I wouldn't trade BAJC nor my life here for a large JCC or synagogue, but I find myself excited to recognize that our isolation is actually somewhat false. We're within one hour of a quite a bit of Jewish activity and two hours of far more. When we first created the BAJC website, we surveyed the congregation and people said they'd like the site to have information about area Jewish happenings beyond BAJC. You'll now find an 'area events' listing at the bottom of our home page. I encourage all of us to think about how we might want to connect Jewishly beyond our own community, whether on the web or physically, and make some plans! As you do, please consider sharing your experiences, either at a service or in the newsletter, so we all can be reminded how much Jewish richness is accessible to us.

B'shalom,
Julie

FIELD TRIPS

Johnny Lee and Andi are planning to attend Shabbat morning services at synagogues in the region on some of the Saturdays when BAJC doesn't have a service scheduled. If you'd like to be notified about when and where they are going, send an e-mail to info@bajcvermont.org

ADULT ED REMINDERS FOR FEBRUARY

BAJC is offering two adult education opportunities in February, in addition to three "drop-in" gatherings. Classes take place at the synagogue. For more information, or to register for the two classes, go online to www.bajcvermont.org, or leave a message on the adult education voicemail at 257-1959.

Basic Judaism, taught by Dr. James Levinson, meets on five Sundays: February 11th, 18th, 25th, March 4th and 11th, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. 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, and identifies directions for further study and participation.

Judaism's Storytelling Treasury, led by guest-storyteller David Arfa, meets on two Sunday afternoons: February 11th and 25th, from 3:00 to 5:00. The classes will explain what Midrash is, what stories are found in the ancient books of Torah, Talmud, Midrash, and Zohar, and how these books connect with the oral tradition. Stories will range from the ancient world to contemporary life and will explore mythology and mysticism.

Drop-in gatherings include Israeli dance on Sunday afternoon, February 3rd at 4:00; Meditation and Mysticism on Sunday afternoon, February 10th at 4:30; Singing is Like Praying Twice on Thursday evening, February 22nd, at 7:00.

ROSH CHODESH GROUP

BAJC women, please join us for our second Rosh Chodesh meeting, celebrating the month of Shevat, on Sunday, February 18, from 1-3 p.m. at Phyllis' home. If you have any questions or want more information, please send an email to info@bajcvermont.org.

The first Rosh Chodesh meeting was held at Susan's on January 7th. Thank you to Susan for providing a warm, intimate setting and to Phyllis for providing refreshments and for blowing the Shofar so beautifully. This first session celebrated the month of Tevet when we remember and mourn the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Tevet is also a time for remembering those who died in the previous year as well as in years past with memories that they have provided us.

TODAH RABBAH

Special thanks to Debbie for keeping our BAJC home squeaky clean, and to Phil for moving our telephone, hanging a clock, trimming the carpet in one of the classrooms, and fixing the lock on the bathroom door. What a blessing to have two such caring people so willing to help! Thanks too to the Hebrew school parents who help get snacks ready for Hebrew school and then sweep and clean after all the kiddies leave. There are still a few open dates that need parent volunteers, so if you haven't already signed up for a date, please do so on the bulletin board in the entrance hall.

WHEN PURIM GOES MAINSTREAM



PURIM PREPARATION

Purim is coming! Purim is coming! Now is the time to plan some fun activities, perhaps a carnival, for Hebrew school on March 5th. If you have some ideas for celebrating Purim and/or if you would like to help plan and run the festivities, please contact Mara or Laura. If you are not a party-planner but you are a baker, how about providing some hamentaschen for the Hebrew school snack that day? You don't necessarily have to be a Hebrew school parent to help make Purim special for the kids; just let Mara or Laura know what you would like to do by sending an email to info@bajcvermont.org.

THE KUTZ CAMPUS EXPERIENCE — SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

The NFTY Kutz Campus for Reform Jewish Teen Life is a unique teen-only Jewish environment for students entering the 9th – 12th grades. Teens travel from all over North America, Israel and other parts of the world to take part in the Kutz experience. Known for its warm community, song sessions, fun and friendships, Kutz is a college-campus-like setting where each young person chooses from programs like TEVA Outdoor Experience, Packing for College, NFTY Mitzvah Corps, Money Matters, Jewish Studies, Hebrew, Teen Leadership and Arts Programs. To receive a brochure and DVD, contact kutzcamp@urj.org or visit us on the web at www.kutz.urjcamp.org.

In addition to the Campus for Jewish Teen Life, Kutz, located in Warwick, N.Y., has both 3 ½ and 6 week programs that focus on building leadership skills, daily services, Israeli dancing and music, and sports, crafts, performance and water activities

Please note that there is an excellent possibility that you can get a generous campership grant from the Grinspoon Foundation (www.hfg.org) and, in addition, you could be the recipient of a scholarship of up to \$500 from our own congregation's Redstone Israel/Kutz Camp Fund, established by Norma's father to encourage our teens to have a summer kibbutz or a Kutz camp experience. Send a letter to BAJC by March 20th stating your plans and why you are interested in either the kibbutz or the camp experience.

SUMMER EXPERIENCES FOR TEENS SPONSORED BY PANIM, THE INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH LEADERSHIP AND VALUES

July 29-August 9, 2007: Live and work in an entirely new culture, living and working on a Native-American reservation to promote positive change. This camping trip in the majestic Southwest includes hands-on service projects with the local population as well as outdoor recreational activities. Make lifelong friends and learn about the ethical values that define Jewish life as you earn community service hours. For more information, check out www.panimworks.org. The program is open to high school rising sophomores, juniors, seniors and graduating seniors. Contact: Anna Levy at 301.770.5070, ext. 209 or PanimWorks@panim.org

June 25-July 22, 2007: Change the way you think about the world, Judaism and yourself through an intensive program on a leading college campus in the nation's capital. Participants will engage in hands-on service projects, learn about the connection between Judaism and advocacy, and learn about key issues impacting the U.S. and the world through interactions with leading U.S. policymakers. Go to www.dccjam.org for more information and to download an application. The program is open to high school rising juniors, rising seniors and graduating seniors. Contact: Pamela Grutman at 301.770.5070, ext. 221 or SummerJAM@panim.org

Check www.hgf.org to see if these two programs are eligible for Grinspoon Foundation campership incentive grants.

SIGN YOUR CHILD UP FOR THE SUMMER OF A LIFETIME: CAMP REGISTRATION OPEN NOW!

With 13 camps across North America, thousands of Reform Jewish children will pack their bags and trunks to go off to camp this summer; will yours be among them? Registration is now open at all URJ Camps. Striving to engage in creative education with the goal of developing a knowledgeable and Jewishly literate community for the future, the URJ Camps are all top of the line facilities, safe Jewish environments and good fun for children of all ages. Learn more today at www.URJCamps.org. BAJC kids are eligible for a Grinspoon Foundation campership grant; apply at www.hgf.org.

TAKING A SPIRITUAL LEAD — HAD'RACHAH SEMINAR FOR LAY LEADERSHIP IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

If you are dedicated to your community, want to lead services, conduct a baby naming and generally serve the spiritual needs of your congregation, why not consider applying 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.

BAJC Mission Statement

The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community provides a context and structure for people to be Jewish together in a rural environment. Our 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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Paul Berch
Laura Berkowitz
Sandra Brodsky
Martin Cohn
Mary Copans
Linda Heimerdinger
Johnny Lee Lenhart
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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. If you are not a member but would like to receive 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.)