

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

March 2007

Adar / Nissan 5767

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

Some of you are aware of the interesting and indeed passionate discussion among American Jews triggered by Alvin Rosenfeld's recent report entitled, "Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism," a report circulated by the American Jewish Committee. Rosenfeld, a well known Holocaust scholar, takes the position that progressive Jews who criticize Israel, if not anti-Semitic themselves, may be aiding and abetting anti-Semitism in the world. Rosenfeld claims to be speaking only of those who question Israel's right to exist, and insists that he's not seeking to scuttle discussion. Yet many disagree, and worry about the effect such statements may be having on Jewish support for Israel in this country.

Let me say, parenthetically, that one of my mentors advised me, when I began serving as a Shaliach Tzibur 18 years ago, "If you want to avoid trouble, don't talk about abortion and don't talk about Israel." Of course we've talked plenty about both. This is a congregation which represents a wide array of opinion on these and many other subjects, and, happily, one where it's safe to voice any of them without fear of reprisal or of being ostracized. I much appreciate, and learn from the comments I receive on all sides of all these issues. Please keep them coming!

Back to Rosenfeld and to the effect his report, and others like it (see for example the writings of Shulamit Reinharz of Brandeis University,) may be having on American Jewish thought and expression with respect to Israel. Some have expressed the belief that real anti-Semites in the world – and none of us can question that they exist – are bolstered in their efforts by criticism of Israel that is voiced within Judaism itself. Others fear that articles like Rosenfeld's have a censorial disposition which will have the effect of alienating a significant portion of

Jewish support in this country at a time when such support is needed more than ever. Limiting discussion, they remind us, has never been a Jewish thing.

So, friends, we have here an important and timely issue, and one on which good and moral individuals can indeed come out in different places. As we discuss this, however, I would propose that we accept as givens two important understandings:

(1) that we exempt from this discussion the clearly legitimate dialogue that engages us as it engages so many Israelis who are working for Israeli-Palestinian understandings and an end to those injustices that inevitably take place in the West Bank – as they have taken place in every occupied territory since the beginning of time. Criticizing injustice anywhere does not imply turning away from our Jewish identity; rather it means turning toward it - toward Tikkun Olam, a central tenet of our Judaism.

(2) that we agree – my African-American friends and I discuss this often - that terms like "anti-Semitic" and "racist" are enormously charged; and that we must be *extremely* careful about using them carelessly or irresponsibly, both because they are so hurtful when used unjustly, but also because they demean the power of these terms when used to describe the genuinely vile prejudice that does exist in the world.

Keeping these guidelines in mind, I look forward to rich discussion on this issue, and indeed on any that pertain to our community, our lives as American Jews, or our relationship to Israel.

B'Shalom,
Jim

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

When we describe our lives to one another, we often parade series of events and happenings that stand out as important and noteworthy. Yet, as the observance of Shabbat teaches us, the quiet and non-exciting time, the time that is not calendared and celebrated and noticed, can be equally valuable. Rabbi Abraham Heschel often spoke that the meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. The other days of the week we live under the tyranny of things in space; on the Sabbath, he wrote, we try to become attuned to holiness in time. During our Sabbath, holiday and ma'ariv services, we are blessed to have the chance to spend quiet and reflective time during the Amidah prayers.

I have had a recent opportunity to consider the value of quiet time when a former BAJC member passed away and our congregation assisted in the funeral arrangements. We are fortunate to have members who are on call as a Chevra Kaddisha (holy society) to help with the traditional arrangements, which include both the ritual of *tahara* (purification) and of providing *shomrim* (watchers). Tahara involves cleansing the body and purification through immersion. The body is then dressed in the traditional shroud and placed in the casket. The shomrim keep a watch over the body so that it is not left alone from the time of tahara to the burial.

I sat as a shomer for a few hours at the funeral home with the casket and a few prayer books including a number of translations of the Psalms, which are traditionally read at such a time. The family provided some books and information about the deceased, so that the shomrim could feel a sense of connection to the deceased. I spent these several hours in quiet, in peace, in prayer and in waiting. The impact of this time has stayed with me, as it has with others who were watchers. I have relearned that one kind of time is not to be measured against other kinds of time, but that all time is valuable. Much can be learned during "down time" and empty time and quiet time. Such time, it can be argued, is indispensable to our wellbeing.

Our congregation maintains two chevra kaddisha groups--one for men and one for women. Both groups are happy to teach, to train, and to share knowledge of the customs and rituals regarding burial practice. The fulfilling of these rituals with respect, knowledge and caring is an important mitzvah, but it also can have a deeply spiritual impact on those who participate.

B'Shalom,
Paul

A NOTE FROM JOHNNY LEE

Paul writes in this issue's *President's Column* about the work of the Chevra Kaddisha of our congregation, a group of volunteers tending to the ritual needs of the deceased. It is a special mitzvah, done without any thought or possibility of repayment (which is not to say that it is done without reward.) Members are trained to handle the body of the deceased ("met" or "metah") respectfully, safely and in accordance with Jewish law and tradition. It tends to be a small number of men and women for whom this work is suited, appealing to those with the constitution, spiritual bent and flexible schedules required to answer the call at a moment's notice.

Then there is the work of the *shomrim*, the larger, spontaneously assembled group of "guards" who sit near the coffin of the met/metah after the Chevra's work is finished until the burial. This is also holy work, requiring some creative scheduling (often with a few middle of the night shifts), but without the need to deal directly with the body of the deceased, and with no prior training required. Paul bears touching witness in his article to the impact of the sh'mira experience.

If you would like to know more about the work of a Chevra Kaddisha or of sitting shomer, you can contact Faith and she will put you in touch with the appropriate person. There are periodic training sessions which give new members the opportunity to learn the practices and rituals. For sitting shomer, you only need to respond to the need when it arises and Faith sends out an appeal to our membership e-mail list. It is an honor to serve our sisters and brothers in these ancient ways.



Tikkun Olam Mitzvah Project

A simple, yet meaningful project is to collect the hotel toiletries from your stay and bring them to a collection basket at BAJC. The items will be donated to Morningside Shelter and the Women's Crisis Center in Brattleboro.

RETURN OF OUR TORAH

On Monday, January 29th, we were blessed to welcome the return of our Torah. Rabbi Kevin Hale, the sofer (scribe) who has been working to make our Torah scroll kosher once again, brought it back during Hebrew school. He showed us some of the repair work he did and told us how he does it, displaying many of the tools he uses and explaining why those particular tools are used. He talked about the traditions and skills of being a sofer and answered many questions. He shared what his examination of the Torah told him about the age and origin of our Torah and showed us how the style of the calligraphy could reveal this information. This was a unique learning experience for our Hebrew school students and staff! We are grateful to Rabbi Hale for so carefully repairing our Torah and for teaching us so much during his visit. We are grateful too to the people who have made donations to the Torah Fund to help pay for the work. Additional donations will be very welcome.



TORAH READERS WANTED

One of our goals at BAJC is to read directly from the Torah scroll at every Saturday morning service. There is a small, but growing, group of volunteer readers who are able to read directly from the scroll (which has no vowels or other "helper" marks). If you have these skills and would like to join the pool of readers, contact Johnny Lee at info@bajcvermont.org.

If you would like to be able to read Torah but don't yet have the skills or experience, there is a great opportunity coming up this Spring. John Ungerleider will be teaching a class on Torah Cantillation through the Adult Education program. Cantillation, or trope, is the art of chanting Jewish scripture. Trope marks are written into preparatory texts (like our Chumash, or a Tikkun) that indicate the proper musical phrases to use to when chanting the text. Once you learn the musical notation you can easily prepare to chant from the Torah. Information about John's class will be in the next newsletter, and on our website.

CELEBRATING ONE MORE SHABBAT EACH MONTH

Currently, BAJC conducts Shabbat services on the first and third Saturday and the second Friday night of each month. Now that we have settled into our own building, another service will be added on the fourth Friday of each month. This added service would begin at 7:30 (to allow people to eat dinner at home before the service). It will be lay-led and will perhaps provide an opportunity for a creative, "different" service. The first one will be on April 27 and will be led by the newly-formed group, Women of BAJC. Anyone interested in leading the "fourth Friday" service on May 25 and June 22 should contact Ritual Committee chair Marty at martin@cohnpr.com. Marty and our Spiritual Leader, Jim Levinson, will gladly assist potential lay leaders in the creation of the service.

SJBC

The Significant Jewish Books Club is returning to a classic for its March selection—*Ivanhoe*, by Sir Walter Scott. We will meet on March 6th at the shul at 6:30 to discuss *Ivanhoe* as a "significant Jewish book," and to enjoy a potluck supper. Please contact Esther for more information or to let her know you will be there.

The next selection after *Ivanhoe* is *A Thread of Grace* by Mary Doria Russell. Discussion and potluck will be on April 24th at 6:30 at Bobbe's home. After that, we will meet on May 29th at Norma's house to discuss *Suite Francaise* by Irene Nemirovsky. If you have never joined us for a book discussion, you are welcome to do so on March 6th, April 24th, and/or May 29th. If you contact Faith (info@bajcvermont.org), she will put you on the SJBC e-mail list.



GOODSEARCH REMINDER

If BAJC had 100 supporters clicking on www.goodsearch.com twice a day, we would receive \$730 in a year! Change your vocabulary: don't "google" —"goodsearch" instead! Tell your friends and relatives to sign on as supporters of the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, then goodsearch away!

GUEST RABBI ON MARCH 9TH

On Friday, March 9th, our Kabbalat Shabbat service will be led by none other than Rabbi David Wolfman, Regional Director of the Northeast Council of URJ. He will be making his first visit to our congregation and is looking forward to meeting as many of our members as possible. He may be accompanied by some of his family, and surely will be accompanied by his guitar! Let's fill the shul for this special event, and bring our best vegetarian and dairy casseroles and salads to the potluck that will follow the service. (And, as much as many of us like to "think snow," let's hope that the weather will be calm and travel-friendly on this particular date!)



MESSAGES IN THE WALL

Paul, Sharon, Faith and Abe will be traveling to Israel on March 15th on a URJ pilgrimage. If you have prayers you would like tucked into the crevices of the Kotel (the Wailing Wall), please give them to one of the travelers by March 12th.

COMMITTEE REQUESTS

Notice to all BAJC committee chairs or other people who wish to have items included in the proposed BAJC budget for 5768: please submit your budget items **by April 19th** to our treasurer by e-mail to info@bajcvermont.org.

The gardening committee is looking for folks willing to help start a garden plot to grow plants to decorate our succah in the fall and to grow food to give to the Drop-in Center. Think Spring, and contact Jackie at info@bajcvermont.org.

Many committees would welcome new members. If you would like to join any of these committees — cemetery, fundraising, education, membership, social action, building and grounds, housekeeping, gardening, chevra kaddisha — contact Faith and she will have a committee chair contact you.

"BAJC Women" Upcoming Programs

March 15th, 6-8 p.m., the "**Women's Seder**" (this is based on a "feminist" Hagaddah- and will inspire a new view for many); **April 15, 3-5 p.m. Rosh Hodesh** (we will be looking for a home and leader for this session); and the **Women's Creative Shabbat Service** on **Friday, April 27 at 7:15** (looking for women who would like to participate as readers. These programs are open to all. There will be a \$10.00 fee for the "Women's Seder" and Rosh Hodesh group for non-members, there will be no fee for BAJC members. If you have any questions, please contact, Yael at women@bajcvermont.org.

Seder Workshop

Would you like to have a Seder in your home but not sure how to get started or need a little encouragement? Come to a Seder Workshop on **Sunday, March 18, 1-3 p.m.** at BAJC. We will go through the basics of the Seder, offer food samples as well as recipes and get you started with confidence. There is no fee for BAJC members and a \$10.00 fee for non-members. Please RSVP to Yael - Workshop Facilitator - at women@bajcvermont.org. (Reservations are required so we know how much to prepare.)

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE TO SPONSOR TWO COFFEEHOUSES

Two important events sponsored by the BAJC Social Action committee will take place this Spring at our shul. Both are "coffee houses" where refreshments will be sold and speakers will present a program. The objective of the presentations will be to raise awareness and money for two important issues. The first, on Sunday March 18th at 4:00 pm, will have two guest speakers from Malawi speaking about AIDS in their country. They will talk about a project that works with children with AIDS in Malawi, and will seek donations for that project. The second presentation is Sunday May 13th from 4:00 - 5:30, when Tom White from the Cohen Center for Holocaust Studies in Keene will speak about the Jewish response to the genocide in Darfur.

GRINSPOON GENEROSITY

From a letter from Joanna Ballantine, the Executive Director of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation: "I am pleased to inform you that the Board of Trustees of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation (HGF) has approved welcoming the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community into eligibility for HGF programs."

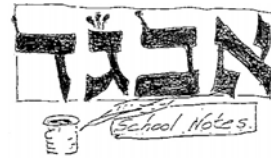
This means that we at BAJC can apply for participation in HGF's Teen Initiative, Jewish Arts and Culture Initiative grants, the Sulamot Family Education Initiative, campership grants and grants for trips to Israel. The generosity of the Grinspoon Foundation can benefit individuals in the Brattleboro area (e.g., Jewish summer camp, travel to Israel), as well as the congregation as a whole in support of our ability to offer educational and cultural programs. Check out the Foundation's site, www.hgf.org, to learn about their mission and the wonderful programs they support, or go to our BAJC website for more information about HGF programs. If you are inspired to develop an activity or program that HGF might underwrite, contact Julie at website@bajcvermont.org to talk it over and plan how to proceed.



IT'S ADAR – TIME TO GET HAPPY!

On Saturday evening, March 3rd, at 6:30, we will gather at shul to welcome Purim. We will have a Purim service including a reading of the Megillah, a costume parade (for adults as well as kids), graggers and other noisemakers, and general merriment. This will be followed by a potluck dessert featuring what else but hamentaschen. If you'd like to help plan, produce, or participate in some of the merriment, please contact Jim at jim@bajcvermont.org. If you can help set up and serve dessert, or if you are going to bake hamentaschen, please contact Faith (faith@bajcvermont.org).

The four mitzvot of Purim are (1) attending a public reading of the Megillah, (2) festivity and rejoicing, drinking and being merry, (3) Mishloach Manot—sending delicacies (a gift of ready-to-eat foods) to at least one friend, and (4) Matanot La'evyonim—giving food and money to at least two poor people (or to an agency that will distribute the gifts to the poor on Purim). You can do the third and fourth mitzvot on your own, but do try the first two in community on March 3rd.



Once again the holidays are coming thick and fast and we at Hebrew School are doing our best to celebrate each with full ceremony. Last month, Jackie and Kita Bet led the entire school in a Tu B'Shvat seder. We once again noted the irony of marking the birthday of the trees and the coming of a Mediterranean spring in the middle of New England's winter. However, as we are now so fortunate to have not only our own building but also quite a bit of our own land, we are looking forward to celebrating Vermont's spring (whenever it may come) and would welcome any adult (parent or not) who would like to join us in a gardening project. Please contact Jackie.

Purim will be celebrated on March 5th with singing, a costume parade, two plays, and, we hope, a great many hamentashen, some of which will be baked by the students. For the rest, we are once again depending on parents! Baking hamentashen is a wonderful family activity for a Sunday afternoon. Recipes and other holiday activities can be found at: <http://www.celebrationsguide.org/purim.html>. This website also includes a Purim craft involving an eggshell stuffed with confetti. While we regret that this will *not* be a Hebrew School activity, we hope that those of our students with particularly lenient parents will try it at home and report back.

Be Happy, It's Adar!
Mara

Make Your Holidays an Opportunity to Pursue Justice!

The Religious Action Center and the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism have a series of Social Action Holiday Guides for both Jewish and secular holidays that include ritual and activity suggestions to help families and individuals enjoy meaningful celebrations. In the coming months be sure to check out the guides for Purim, Passover and Shavuot, as well as secular holidays such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day. All can be found on line at www.rac.org/holidayguides.

FROM A LETTER FROM BRETT

Shalom!

I just got back from a Livnot Birthright Israel trip that started as a two-week trip but expanded to five. I prayed at the Kotel in Jerusalem, hiked Masada, floated in the Dead Sea, hitchhiked from the West Bank while watching vibrant and full rainbows follow us, and the list goes on. It was absolutely incredible. To be honest, it is pretty hard to communicate all that I experienced in Israel, so I will just express some general feelings. Like the land itself in the winter, my experiences were vast and overwhelming. I yearn (or in King David's words- I mushroom) for the day I go back. I really connected with the type of Judaism that was practiced in the Livnot program, which is completely different from any of the more party-focused Birthright programs for younger people. I believe a lot of Vermont Jews would fall for this program similar to the way I did. Livnot is a very laid-back program with some seriously deep spiritual roots. There is a strong focus on nature and community (through hikes and preservation activities, community service, food, music, and celebration). I feel so blessed to have experienced all I did for the past month. I finally felt my spiritual thirst begin to quench. During one of the last discussions we had as a group, we expressed how important it is to be "radically amazed" and be in a state of "constant wonder." These are the closest words I can come up with to articulate this past month for me. Unfortunately, for me (and, I suspect, a lot of other American Jews), those are concepts that I just hadn't experienced before. Being a Jew who grew up in a secular home and never adjusted to Hebrew school, I can say this is what I have been missing. I further believe all young Jews, especially American Jews, should have similar experiences. Livnot (fondly referred to as "a cult that lets you leave") filled a void for me that was missing from my American practice of Judaism. If you know of anyone interested in going to Israel or having problems connecting with Judaism, I would love to talk to them.

When we arrived in Israel we were greeted by signs that said "WELCOME HOME." I would soon learn just how at home I would be in this land. American Jews must go to Israel at some point in their lives. My reasons for saying this are first, more people deserve to experience what I have stumbled on--people just have no idea what they are missing, and second, it helps to have a strong "alumni" community of Livnot "graduates" all over the United States and I desire greatly to be able to connect more with the Livnot environment that I shared in Israel. I would also like to assure people of the safety in Israel.

Even when I left the protective bubble of the Livnot program, I felt entirely safe. I have loads of pictures to show, stories to tell, and songs to sing that will convince anyone that Israel is not one big war zone. In fact, my group recorded a double album CD for subsequent Livnot groups that I am convinced, if played loudly in a room filled with the world's heads of state, would make them all clasp each other's shoulders, sing from the bottom of their hearts, and declare everlasting world peace. May your moments of wonder and radical amazement never end.

Brett

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.

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.

A FREE TRIP TO ISRAEL

Do you know an 18-26 year-old Reform Jew who has not been to Israel? If so, the birthright KESHER Israel Connection is the perfect program. The KESHER College Department, in conjunction with Taglit birthright Israel, is ready to give qualified young people the trip of a lifetime—for free! Registration is now open, but space is limited for the KESHER Israel Connection birthright Israel trip. KESHER engages its participants in an extensive Reform Jewish experience in Israel. For more information, visit www.keshernet.com/birthright

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. To receive a brochure and DVD, contact kutzcamp@urj.org or visit 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.

TWO UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSIST JEWISH YOUNG PEOPLE

(1) LIVE & WORK NEAR MOUNT SNOW — Health Care & Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont is seeking an individual or couple to come live with a young developmentally and physically disabled young man in his 2 bedroom, West Dover, VT apartment. This young man requires assistance with all levels of personal care and accessing his community. He enjoys swimming, music and being with others in a quiet environment.

The ideal provider will be able to lift & assist with the personal care needs, be able to drive a small wheelchair van, and know how to provide a kosher living environment. In return for sharing this home, the provider will receive over \$30,000 a year in tax free income, training, support, respite and day program services.

For more information or to request an application, please call Bart Mair at 802-674-6078 or toll free at 1-877-825-4664 and request an application. E-mail address bmair@hcrs.org HCRS is a private non-profit community services organization.

(2) HOST AN EXCHANGE STUDENT FOR THE FALL SEMESTER, 2007 — Tamara, a lovely 16-year old exchange student from Brazil, is looking for placement in a Jewish home for the fall semester. The host family provides room and board, love and English. The student will have her own spending money and health insurance and will participate fully in your family's activities, schedules, chores, and rules.

For more information about Tamara or the program, email info@bajcvermont.org.

TWO UPCOMING PROGRAMS FOR JEWISH COUPLES

An introduction to Jewish Couples Enhancement will be offered on Saturday night, March 10, at 7:30 at the NACUL Center, 592 Main St., Amherst. Participants will learn the five basic qualities for a successful relationship, explore bringing out the best in one another and in the relationship, discover treasures of Shabbat for enriching your life, and practice new communication skills. All couples are welcome--Jewish, Interfaith, and all sexual orientations. This program is supported by a grant from The Harold Grinspoon Foundation and is co-sponsored by Jewish Family Services of Western Mass. Cost for the evening is just \$36 per couple, including wine and desserts. Pre-registration is preferred by Wednesday, March 7. Register at www.basherte.org or by phone at (413) 253-5071.

Aligning the Desires of Your Heart, a weekend retreat for couples on April 13-15 at the Elat Chayyim Center for Jewish Spirituality at the Isabella Freedman Center in the Berkshires, offers couples in committed relationships an opportunity to strengthen their connection to one another. Communication processes and texts will be integrated with loving Co-Co-sponsored by Basherte and Hebrew College, registration is at (800)398-2630 www.elatchayyim.org/couples

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

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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.)