

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

May 2007

Iyar / Sivan 5767

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

At our Shabbat morning service during Passover, we discussed together that interesting challenge posed some years ago to by the Dalai Lama to a group of rabbis. The Tibetan Buddhist leader, recognizing that his people were now a people in diaspora, asked the People of the Diaspora how to keep his people connected and together despite great distances separating them. Some of the rabbis, interestingly, suggested that the Tibetans create "a Passover," taking a master story of the Tibetan people, filling it with symbols, and celebrating it every year on the same day all over the world.

At our Greenleaf service, we discussed this issue of Diaspora at some length agreeing that, in general, our history, our heritage, our rituals, our worship, our strong sense of education, our worship, and, perhaps most importantly the communities Jews have formed in Diaspora have kept us together as a people.

So while many of us have a deep reverence for Eretz Yisrael, and while many Jews continue to see Israel as the epicenter of our people, it's also clear that the Jewish Diaspora is here to stay. These two worlds, in fact, complement one another in some strange and ironic ways. Many Israelis who lead secular lives because the practice of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Judaism does not meet their spiritual needs (see Paul's column on the challenges facing the Reform Movement in Israel), are surprised to discover a deep and meaningful spirituality when they encounter non-Orthodox worship in Europe and the United States. At the same time, genuinely open-ended dialogue about Israel and Palestine, frequently stifled in the U.S., is alive and well in Israel itself.

So what allows us to create and maintain a healthy and yet connected Jewish Diaspora? Surely not the mentality of the early years of the 20th century when the assimilationist German Jewish editors of the New York Times were embarrassed by Theodore Herzl and the new Zionism, tried to ignore it, and, when pressed, would insist that America is the new Zion for its Jews. Probably also not, at least for Jews in this country, the mentality that we are ever on the edge of destruction, and only in Israel, among our own, can we be safe. Indeed, we remember well the challenge presented to us as American Jews by Reb Robert Levine at our Dedication last year: remaining a vibrant and connected people despite the *absence* of overt persecution.

A healthy Diaspora, I would suggest, is one where diversity among Jews exists and is encouraged, but where, within this diversity, we are connected by an active (not a passive) sense of Jewish identity. A healthy Diaspora is characterized by a desire not only to maintain but also to renew that sense of identity by *choosing* to learn together, worship together, support one another as community and continue weaving together that golden thread of *tikkun olam*, of healing the world, our great mission. I like to think that our little community in southern Vermont is indeed a healthy part of that Diaspora according to these criteria.

B'Shalom,
Jim

WARNING OF ANNUAL BAJC MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Monday, June 4th at 6:30 at the synagogue
Agenda includes annual reports, vote on the
proposed budget, election of Trustees

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

"Reform Jews need Israel; Israel needs Reform Jews". The truth of these words was apparent at virtually every moment of my recent trip to Israel, accompanied by Sharon, Faith and Abe and about 30 other New Englanders from small congregations. Prior to our leaving the States for Israel, we were presented with a beautiful poem titled "Tourists" by Yehuda Amichai. It suggested a great truth – that as tourists we should pay most attention not to the ancient arches, but rather to the human beings sitting next to those arches. Unexpectedly, what moved me the most in Israel was the passion and the dedication of the people we met, not sights like the Western Wall or Masada.

In meeting and talking with Israelis, we were confronted with the many conflicts they face on a daily basis: giving up sons and daughters to the military, the loss of their children and their neighbors' children in what appears to be endless war, and remembering and honoring the past while trying to create a new tomorrow. Those are external questions about which we in America are familiar.

We were also exposed to difficult internal questions that ranged from how to create a religiously pluralistic society to how kibbutzim can transition from the original socialist model to a mixed public/private ownership model, a transition that many are going through to remain economically viable.

I, for one, was shocked to see the reality of how small a toe-hold the Reform and Conservative movement has in Israel. It is one thing to know that the governing political parties, operating on a coalition system, have long made political deals with the ultra-Orthodox in Israel – a trade of religious power for political power; it is another to visit the modern, progressive city of Haifa – some half million people- and learn there are exactly two Reform temples and just a few Conservative synagogues, or to learn from the mayor of Kiryat Shmona that there is no such thing as Reform in the city. It is one thing to know that the Israeli government provides financial subsidies to Orthodox congregations, but not to Reform or Conservative; it is another to visit Pinat Shorashim in the Galilee, with its small (Brattleboro-size) synagogue and Biblical Garden Program – you gotta see it- and know it gets not one shekel from the Government, while an Orthodox rabbi for that area gets a subsidy, even though he doesn't even have a congregation. The wonderful and inspiring rabbi for the Pinat Shorashim kibbutz, Rabbi Mary Gold, told us of her pending litigation in the Israeli Supreme Court to grant rights to non-Orthodox rabbis to

conduct conversions – a big issue in Israel, given the large wave of Russian emigration and the desire of many people to convert with Reform or Conservative rabbis.

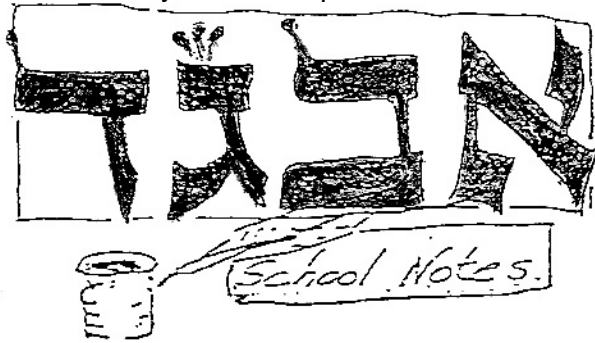
We were moved beyond words by Rabbi Maya Leibovich of Kehilat Mevasseret Zion, a small community located outside Jerusalem. She may still be the only Israeli-born woman to lead a congregation in all of Israel; she was certainly the first to be ordained. In her community of 20, 000 there are some 40 Orthodox congregations, in which women take no part in the service. Led by Rabbi Leibovich and starting in the usual path of meeting in member's homes, a Reform synagogue was born. A kindergarten was founded in 1996 with a class of 14 children in a rented apartment. It was firebombed the following year – not by Arabs but by fanatic Jews. Today, a beautiful synagogue is being completed; there are over 100 students in the Hebrew School and there are social service programs to aid immigrants and women victims of violence, as well as youth programs and ecology programs and organ donor programs – all from this wonderful synagogue and all without any financial support from the Israeli government. Rabbi Leibovich speaks of the need for Reform Jews everywhere to support the liberal Reform movement in Israel. She speaks of the need to create an alternative choice that is neither Orthodox nor secular (non-religious). She speaks of the need for Reform Judaism to bridge not only between the old and the new in Judaism, but also to bridge tradition and democracy, so that a sterile theocracy is not what passes for religion in Israel. We met many faces; we were moved by many stories. These are just a few of them.

B'Shalom,
Paul

UPDATING THE YAHRZEIT LIST

We keep a yahrzeit list for our members as a reminder of the date on which to honor relatives or other dear ones who have died, and we publish the appropriate part of the list in the newsletter each month. If you want a name added to this list at any time, contact Faith and tell her the name of the person, the person's relationship to you, and the Hebrew date of death. If you do not know the Hebrew date, give us the month, date, and year according to our civil calendar and we can translate it to the Hebrew date, which will be the same each year. Names will be mentioned for Kaddish at the service closest to the Hebrew date. It is traditional to make a donation in memory of the person you are

honoring on the anniversary date, and to be at the service to say Kaddish if possible.



Shalom alelchem,

Despite the challenging weather, the Hebrew School managed to conduct the Second Annual Search for and Burning of the Chomitz. Kudos to Kita for an excellent job of concealing the chomitz for which everyone searched. Indeed, little baggies of stale breakfast cereal continue to come to light in unexpected places. I hope the kids all made good showings at your seders with the Four Questions. We spent some time drilling on that old favorite, "Beyn yosh veen oovayn misubeen." Try that ten times fast.

The students have been learning more Hebrew than I think even they realize. Our goal for Spring was to master the V'ahavta. They seem to be about there, just in time for our second Hebrew School Shabbat on Friday, May 11th. I hope to see you there for what will certainly be an event filled with much joyful enthusiasm.

As always, thanks for bringing us your smart, funny, energetic kids. They challenge us. They wear us out. They are terrific.

B'shalom
Mara

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. Anyone interested in leading the "fourth Friday" service on May 25 and June 22 should contact Ritual Committee chair Marty Cohn at ritual@bajcvermont.org. Marty and our Spiritual

Leader, Jim Levinson, will gladly assist potential lay leaders in the creation of the service.

Save The Date!

BAJC Summer FUNdraiser

Sunday, August 19, 2007

"Israeli Film & Food Festival"
Celebrating the vibrancy of the
Israeli film industry.

Details to follow.

YIZKOR AGAIN

The fourth and last Yizkor service of the year will take place at 6:00 on May 23rd at the evening service (ma'ariv) for Shavuot. Yizkor is the memorial service recited four times a year for each person in our lives whose memory is cherished, as well as for those lost in the Holocaust and for all who have no one to remember them. It is an opportunity to remember loved ones by reciting prayers in their memory and by doing tzedukah and deeds of lovingkindness in their names.

SUMMMER READING

Curl up with a **Significant Jewish Book** from the Reform Movement's recommended list. Consider the following from the Summer 2007 recommended list, or consider joining BAJC's Significant Jewish Books Club (SJBC) and helping select a book for every-other-month discussions. Study and discussion guides for the first two books will be available this summer, joining a host of other guides posted online on the Reform Judaism Web site at

www.reformjudaismmag.org .

For more information, log on to www.urj.org/books .

Rembrandt's Jews by Steven Nadler—Jews found an unprecedented level of tolerance in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. Dutch attitudes toward Jews—as seen through the lens of Dutch art—is the starting point for this history.

Rashi's Daughters: Book I—Joheved by Maggie Anton. This novel, the first in a trilogy about Rashi's three daughters, is based on legends about these women who reputedly could write, studied Talmud, and even wore *tifilli*. That Rashi permitted such

practices in his own household lends support to Jewish feminists today.

The Other Shulman: A Novel by Alan Zweibel. This hilarious novel by one of the writers of *Saturday Night Live* captures the process of a midlife change through the lens of the New York City Marathon, one chapter for each mile.

Lion's Honey: The Myth of Samson by David Grossman. Based on his close reading of Judges 13–16, the author sees Samson not as the popular folk hero nor as the aggressive rogue condemned by the rabbis, but rather as a tragically lonely and isolated man, caught up in a destiny he did not choose and does not fully understand.

Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish by Dovid Katz. Unlike other popular books on Yiddish, this masterful text by a master linguist presents a cohesive intellectual history of Ashkenazic Jews through the story of the Yiddish language.



TIKKUN OLAM MITZVAH PROJECT

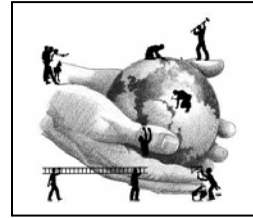
A simple, yet meaningful project is to collect the hotel toiletries from your stay and bring them to a collection basket at BAJC. The items will be donated to Morningside Shelter and the Women's Crisis Center in Brattleboro.

BRATTLEBORO PRAYERS AND TZEDUKAH IN ISRAEL



Before Paul, Sharon, Abe and I went to Israel in March, many of you gave us prayers to deliver to the Kotel, as well as tzedukah for Israel. We carefully tucked your prayers into the crevices of the Western Wall, already quite filled with the prayers of the many people who make pilgrimage to this holy place. We hope all your prayers are granted! Your coins and bills were given to the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the One Family Fund (for victims of terror), Yad Lakashish (Lifeline for the Aged) and Yad Sarah - two private non-profit agencies—the first providing services and a workplace for the elderly, the second providing canes, crutches, wheelchairs, and other such supplies free to people in need. The four of us were grateful to be able to deliver your prayers and your tzedukah to Israel, and we hope many of you will soon visit Israel, our spiritual homeland.

B'shalom,
Faith



SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

First, a reminder from the Social Action committee that there is a Coffeehouse on Sunday afternoon, May 13th at 4:00. Tom White from the Cohen Center for Holocaust Studies in Keene will speak about the Jewish response to the genocide in Darfur. Coffee and light refreshments will be available.

Then, from a note from Luwiza Soko Pulenu and Shawa Mwvakilma, speakers at the March Coffeehouse: We write to thank you for the donations you made to the orphans of Lilongwe, Malawi, Sunday, 18th March 2007. The total donation is \$319. We are very grateful for that and want you to know that recipients would share the same sentiments. We are also thankful for the opportunity you gave us to come to your community and share with you the HIV/AIDS situation in our country, Malawi. Lastly, we are indebted to Janet for arranging the event, and all the youth who had a hand in the preparations. We wish you all the best in your undertakings, and God should continue blessing you. (By the way, thanks for the good snacks.)

VIRTUAL TRAVEL--AROUND THE WORLD WITH THE GORDONS

On Sunday, May 20th, at 7 pm at the BAJC synagogue at 151 Greenleaf Street, the Gordon family will present a slide show of their around-the-world journey last year. For nine months, the Gordons left behind the safe confines of Southern Vermont and traveled the globe. Starting in Switzerland, they first biked 1600 miles through Northern Italy, France, and Spain to Granada, where they rented an apartment for a month while they took Spanish classes and enjoyed Spanish living, Spanish soccer, and Spanish food.

After sending their bikes home, they flew off to Morocco, then on to Israel for a month of culture, history, politics, and beautiful nature. From there, it was off to India for a month, to stay with an Indian family in a small village in Gujarat. Next it was on to Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia for two months of beaches, trekking in the jungle, and learning about life in some of the poorest areas of the world.

After a couple weeks in Bali, where Rick and Elaine led a community service program 15 years earlier, the family travels ended with a month each in New Zealand and Australia, highlighted by adventure travel, hiking, biking, kayaking, and scuba diving with sharks.

Throughout their journey, the Gordons experienced universal goodness around the world, and a welcome spirit toward Americans. Admission to the presentation is free, but donations to the building fund will be gladly accepted. Light refreshments will be served.

FREE WEEKLY E-JEWISH NEWS

Want to receive a weekly update of news of the Jewish world? Now, as a benefit of our congregation's membership in the Union for Reform Judaism, you can receive a free subscription to the Weekly Briefing, an e-mail of news about the Union and the greater Jewish world. Produced in cooperation with JTA: The Global News Service of the Jewish People, the Weekly Briefing is delivered to your inbox every Friday. To subscribe, go to www.urj.org/subscribe.

CHRONOLOGICAL GAMUT AT THE MAY KABBALAT SHABBAT

At our May 11th Kabbalat Shabbat, we will celebrate both the youngest and the oldest of our congregation. Beginning at 6:00, the youngsters of our Hebrew school will be actively involved in the service welcoming Shabbat, and we will also be celebrating the 85th birthday of Rosalie, who now has the honor of being the most "chronologically advantaged" member of our congregation. At 7:00 we will have our usual potluck dinner. Bring a delicious vegetarian or dairy main dish or salad, then be ready to share a birthday cake with Rosalie to wish her well.

OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK

Two Rockingham girls, one ten and one seven, would like to learn Hebrew but cannot make it to our Hebrew school. If you can tutor the girls privately, for a fee, please let Faith know and she will put you in contact with the family.

If you would like to provide lay leadership for upcoming services, particularly our newly-instituted "fourth Friday," please contact Marty, Ritual chair (martin@cohnpr.com or 257-1959). The Friday night dates are May 25th and June 22nd. There are also open dates during the summer for both Friday nights and Saturday mornings. Individuals or groups can talk to Marty about the services they wish to lead.

At our annual meeting on June 4th, we will elect four Trustees whose term will begin on September 1, 2007. If you are interested in serving on the BAJC Board of Trustees, please contact 257-1959. Currently the Board meets on the fourth Monday night of each month, and Board members are encouraged to chair or participate actively in the work of at least one committee (e.g., membership, cemetery, education, fundraising, etc.). The term of office is three years. Current Board members are: Paul Berch, Julie Strothman, Laura Berkowitz, Randy Terk, Faith and Abe Schuster, Joe Rosen, Marty Cohn, Sandy Brodsky, Margie Pivar, Mary Copans, Linda Heimerdinger, Johnny Lee Lenhart; the terms of Faith and Abe, Randy, Johnny Lee, and Laura expire at the end of this August. Four trustees are elected each year and there is no term limit. At this moment, we do not know if there will be openings beyond the four, but new candidates are always encouraged to run for a seat.



BNAI MITZVAH CLASS TRIP

B'nai Mitzvah students Ali, Margaret, Manya and Galen, enjoyed a wonderful weekend in New York City recently. Accompanied by parents Judy and Elaine, the students arrived at Grand Central Station on Friday evening with just enough time to get a slice of pizza and catch the subway uptown to Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, the famous synagogue on the Upper West Side (where the rabbi is Robert Levine, Joe and Marcia's brother-in-law and guest speaker at our dedication service last August). As we entered the beautiful space and found our seats, the service began with over a hundred voices singing to welcome in Shabbat. The experience was incredibly moving and within minutes we felt that, if all we did in New York was attend the service, the trip would have met our intent of exploring Judaism in NYC and having an adventure as a class.

But the Kabbalat Shabbat service was just the beginning of a fabulous weekend that included two more days of fun and learning. In addition to the regular exhibits detailing the Ellis Island experience and finding names on the wall of honor, we took in the special exhibit on immigration stories of teenagers new to America. This spectacular exhibit captured in photos and stories the determination and strength of those who are courageous enough to leave their homeland and all that is familiar to them to seek tolerance and understanding in an adopted homeland. It was particularly poignant as our students are becoming adult members of the Jewish community.

The time spent riding buses and subways, eating in Chinatown, touring Times Square, seeing a Broadway show, walking through Central Park and sleeping six in a studio apartment was filled with conversation, laughter and an emerging sense of the wonders of the city and the lives we lead and choices we make.

Our last stop was The Jewish Museum where Galen's family met us for a very accessible look at Judaism, both historically and in modern times. With just enough time to purchase some Judaica and catch the bus to Grand Central to head back to Vermont, the entire group agreed it was a fantastic experience and there is talk of a return trip post Bar/Bat mitzvah.

AN INVITATION

Our congregation has been invited to attend Congregation Ahavas Achim's Havdalah ceremony on Saturday, May 5th at 7:00 honoring Rabbi Micah Becker-Klein as he begins a new chapter of his life following six years of service to the Keene congregation.

SEE "ENCOUNTER POINT" AT S.I.T.

Encounter Point is an 85-minute feature documentary film that follows a former Israeli settler, a Palestinian ex-prisoner, a bereaved Israeli mother and a wounded Palestinian bereaved brother who risk their lives and public standing to promote a nonviolent end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their journeys lead them to the unlikeliest places to confront hatred within their communities. The film explores what drives them and thousands of other like-minded civilians to overcome anger and grief to work for peace. It can be seen at SIT at 7:00 on Friday, May 4th.

YOM YERUSHALAYIM

This special holiday on the Israeli calendar is observed on 28 Iyar, May 16th this year. It celebrates the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. After the War of Independence (1948), Jerusalem was divided, with half of the Old City, including the Western Wall, under Jordanian control, off limits to Jews. June 7, 1967 marked the first time in nearly two thousand years that Jerusalem was united under Jewish authority.

Jerusalem was the capital of the first kingdom of Israel, founded by King David. It is also the site of the First and Second Temples. Jews have lived and prayed within her walls and defended her soil for centuries. Every site, every landmark is a testimonial to its historical significance. For many, Jerusalem is the national and spiritual center of Judaism. Yehuda Amichai once wrote "Jerusalem is a port city on the shore of eternity."

ASSISI INSTITUTE LECTURE IN BRATTLEBORO

The Assisi Institute will present its 2007 annual lecture at the Latchis Theater in Brattleboro on May 18th, with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, one of the world's greatest proponents of Judaic wisdom, doing a unique day-long lecture, "Kabbalah, Myth, and Archetype: Reviving the Ancient Teachings." Although BAJC is not a sponsor of this event, the Institute is offering a reduced seminar fee of \$65 for Brattleboro area people. For more information, or to register, call 802-254-6220, or check the website at www.assisiconferences.com.

YOU'RE INVITED: BIENNIAL 2007

Join thousands of Reform Jews (and Faith and Abe) this December 12th-16th in sunny San Diego for the 2007 Union for Reform Judaism General Assembly and Biennial Convention. Come to see for yourself what the excitement is all about! Learn and pray with leaders of the congregations from across North America as you grow as a Reform Jew. For more information please visit www.urj.org/biennial.

OUTREACH FELLOWS FOR CONVERSION CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Apply now for the Outreach Fellows Program for Conversion Certification taking place this July 25th through 29th at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Now in its seventh year, this program will prepare you to counsel, support and welcome prospective Jews into your community. Train with HUC-JIR faculty members, congregational rabbis, and the URJ program staff. This exceptional program is will not be held again until 2009, so do not miss this opportunity to study, pray and learn skills and techniques that will help your congregation create a warm and supportive environment for potential Jews. For more information visit www.urj.org/outreach, call (212) 650-4230 or e-mail outreach@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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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.)