

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

June 2007

Sivan / Tammuz 5767

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

These weeks, coinciding with my 65th birthday and my retirement from Tufts, have been a time for some reflection on life more generally. Invariably, these reflections have been leading me to a yet deeper sense of gratitude. The Tufts retirement calls up gratitude to my students and to my colleagues here and in Asia and Africa for the work we've been able to do together to improve human wellbeing and reduce deprivation. (I'll be continuing the international work and also will be doing some teaching at SIT.)

More generally, I've been experiencing lots of gratitude for my family (as I write this, we're busily preparing for Dora's college graduation), for Vermont, and for our BAJC community. And gratitude simply for living in this Brattleboro area – one that cares so deeply about people (witness the extraordinary outpouring of support for Gary) as well as about heifers.

Nearly every week, my gratitude for our Jewish community gets reactivated. I'm still smiling about our women-led service at the end of April. Throughout that service, I kept thinking about the founders of our congregation who formulated the "Brattleboro Experiment" – the idea that instead of having a rabbi "do" Judaism for us, we would "do" Judaism ourselves. The service also called to mind the pledge we made to Rabbi Noah Kitty at her farewell service – a pledge that we would not retreat one iota from the progress toward gender equality the congregation had made under her leadership, and only move forward.

I had the same feeling of gratitude when Johnny Lee put out the call for Torah readers for Margaret's Bat Mitzvah, and had six volunteers within 24 hours! This

is a commentary both on the literacy of our congregation and on our eagerness to share and extend that literacy.

And my gratitude was activated when we celebrated the 90th birthday of Rosalie at our Friday evening service in May, and the children sat around her and listened avidly as she recalled her own childhood and spoke about some of what she's learned since. That service made clear, if there ever was any doubt, another of our sacred principles: that we hold dear – very dear – those of us in the golden age of life, and that we never allow them to be forgotten.

Finally, on the subject of birthdays, I'm eagerly looking forward to the joint birthday celebration for Paul and myself at our Shabbat evening service on Friday June 8. And here's my hope for that service: that our walls will be bulging at the seams, and that at least seven of us (seven is a number of mystical significance in Judaism) will come up with the idea that we need to expand our space!

B'Shalom,
Jim



**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
MONDAY, JUNE 4 • 6:30pm
AT THE SHUL**

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Last month I wrote of the bond between the country of Israel and the Reform Movement in the US. I noted the importance of mutual support between the two. Support of Israel and its people is central to who we are as Jews in the Diaspora; support of religious pluralism in Israel from American Jews is critical as the non-Orthodox in Israel work towards an equal place at the table in terms of practice and ritual.

This support of the State of Israel and its people clearly does not imply that we support the political choices of any particular governmental group in Israel. In fact, the Reform movement is often highly critical of policy initiatives of Israeli governing institutions.

I have also written of our national affiliate, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). For the past several years, our major focus here in the Brattleboro area has not been on national issues but rather has been on our own local needs--notably, buying our land and creating the first temple in our region. During this time, we have also focused on the larger, yet still immediate, community. Mainly thanks to the efforts of our spiritual leader, Jim Levinson, we have been a part of, and supporter of, the Brattleboro area interfaith community. Our local interfaith community reflects the world community and is not isolated from issues that are discussed and fought over around the world. Our interfaith community is a model of what can be accomplished by people of good faith who have the energy and desire to work together to promote what any one group working alone cannot.

It is important to note that not only does BAJC participate in public interfaith events, but also Jim is often called upon at times of conflict to educate, mediate and bridge differences on a less public basis. We are all proud of the respect that is afforded Jim Levinson in the interfaith community of our region.

As part of our larger focus, especially relating to URJ, I would like to introduce ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America, which is a separate entity affiliated with URJ but not funded by it.

Without endorsing any particular Israeli government, its mission is to connect Reform Jews and Israel. Fitting into the model that I have discussed previously, ARZA focuses on two agendas: First, it promotes efforts to make Israel important in the lives and identities of Reform Jews in America. It provides educational materials to individuals and congregations, travel to Israel (featuring a new, modestly priced two-week package with a

Reform/Progressive flavor), and opportunities for advocacy, all from a Reform Zionist perspective.

Secondly, ARZA utilizes the efforts of progressive Reform Jews in America to influence societal issues in Israel. It is a funding source and supporter of the Israeli Religious Action Center (IRAC), which litigates in Israel to expand the rights of Israeli Jews who are neither secular nor Orthodox. ARZA also funds and supports other efforts in Israel to promote social and legal equality for progressive Judaism in Israel.

ARZA has programs in the US as well as in Israel, including an adult education curriculum on Israel. In June ARZA is sponsoring a forum in Washington D.C. that relates to the question of Israel and Iran's nuclear weapons program.

The cost for membership in ARZA is modest. If you wish to know more, please be in touch with Faith or me, or check the web: www.arza.org.

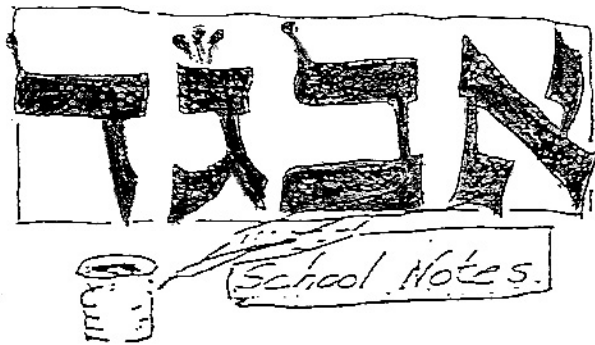
B'Shalom,
Paul

TODAH RABBAH

Many thanks to Felipe for constructing and installing a much-needed shield to keep our big bright outside light from shining into our downhill neighbor's bedroom window; to Ari, Ali and Martin for so well-representing the entire Hebrew school at the Kabbalat Shabbat service on May 11th; to Joe, Johnny Lee, Faith, Abe, Stuart, Deb, and Allen for working on behalf of the rest of the congregation at Green-up/Clean-up Day on the 13th; to Rick, Elaine, Manya, and Koby for their delightful slide presentation of their unique nine-month round-the-world adventure; to Jerry for kicking off our August 19th fundraiser by being the very first person to purchase tickets to the Israeli Film and Food Festival. We hope many others will follow all these good examples of ways to support our synagogue!

MONDAY MA'ARIV

Our regular Monday ma'ariv services will take place at 6:00 on June 4th and 11th, then will discontinue for the summer, to resume on September 10th. If anyone needs a minyan to say Kaddish for shiva or for a yearzeit during the summer, we will do our best to convene a minyan on the day it is needed, either at the shul or elsewhere, if you contact Faith (464-2632) or Marty (246-1435) a few days in advance of the date needed.



HEBREW SCHOOL NOTES

Shalom aleichem,

We are counting the omer while counting down to the end of the school year, a coincidence that has confused at least one student, who thought they were directly related. The teachers, students, and administration have all been discussing what we would like to see continue next year, and what changes need to be made.

Perhaps our greatest challenge this past year has been the large number of students, especially in the Gimmel and Dalet classes. We are therefore bringing in a sixth teacher, with the goal of having no more than eight children in a class. Planning the make-up of these new classes will be facilitated by parents registering their kids now, and encouraging anyone new to the community to contact us before the end of the school year.

Suggestions from the kids include: more crafts, more outdoor activities, more whole-school events, and more bonfires--all excellent ideas. The teachers will be meeting over the summer to discuss these and other plans. If you have any suggestions to share about the school, or if you would like to become a member of next year's education committee, please contact me or Faith. I would especially like to hear from any parent whose child was *not* happy at Hebrew School. While praise is lovely to hear, constructive criticism can point out ways in which we can grow and improve.

With the last day of Hebrew school coming up on June 11th, this is my opportunity to express in writing sincere thanks to the parents who helped in the classrooms and signed up for snack and clean-up duty; to Laura and John who both met regularly with Hebrew reading groups; to Zoë; and to Miriam, our beloved "Miss Helper." You all helped keep us going. I will be contacting all of the parents later in the summer with many more wonderful volunteer opportunities. How else are we going to manage all those new projects, festivals, and bonfires?

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 June 22 should contact Ritual Committee chair Marty Cohn at 802-246-1435 or ritual@baicvermont.org. Marty and our Spiritual Leader, Jim Levinson, will gladly assist potential lay leaders in the creation of the service.



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.

JUDY CHICAGO EXHIBIT AT HUC-JIR

On view until July 6th in the Museum at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, an exhibit "Judy Chicago: Jewish Identity," a career survey focusing on the impact of Judy Chicago's Eastern-European roots on her identity and artistic vision, a part of national Feminist Art Project promoting awareness of women's cultural production and feminist art. The Museum is at One West Fourth Street in Manhattan. Admission is free. Go to www.huc.edu/museum/ny for more information, or call 212-824-2205.



GOODSEARCH REMINDER

If BAJC had 100 supporters clicking on 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!

MEMBERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS

BAJC members receive a newsletter by mail eleven or twelve times a year, and members with computers receive interim updates and announcements by e-mail. People who are not members who live out of the Brattleboro area or who are seasonal residents may subscribe to the newsletter for \$36 a year and they may opt into (or out of) the e-mail updates. People who live in the Brattleboro area but are not members can subscribe to the newsletter for one year, after which we hope they will become members and thus will continue receiving the newsletter. The same is true for e-mail; the e-mail connection is for members and newsletter subscribers. Non-members and non-subscribers and all others who wish to maintain contact with BAJC for information and activities can check our always-up-to-date website, www.bajvermont.org.

It is likely that the next newsletter after this June issue will be a combined July-August summer issue that will come out at the beginning of July. Please send in all articles and items for the summer newsletter by the 15th of June.

By the way, you might be interested in a comment from a very discouraged newsletter editor in another congregation. In answering a question on a URJ listserv about whether newsletters ought to be on-line or on the congregation's website rather than being printed and snail-mailed, she said:

People do not read email; they do not read snail mail; they do not answer their phones because they have caller ID; they do not read the Bulletin; they do not look at the website; and yet they complain because they are not informed. .

With all that is done by Temples these days to keep the congregation informed, I have little sympathy for those who claim they do not know what is going on in the Temple. Maybe if an individual put a foot in the door for a Kabbalat Shabbat or Shabbat Shacharit service once in a while, or volunteered to do something for the Temple, he or she might know what is going on.

Let us hope that the editor of the BAJC newsletter does not face this problem and that BAJC members all profit from the information they read in the newsletter, in e-mails, and on the website. Be a member! Stay informed! Get involved!

CELEBRATE SHABBAT WITH A BABY-NAMING

Our Shabbat shacharit and Torah service at 10:00 on June 2nd will include a joyous life-cycle event—the naming of Felicia and Jim's grandson. Baby and parents will be visiting from Wisconsin. Come welcome this new little one into our Jewish family, and share a festive oneg after the service.

CELEBRATE KABBALAT SHABBAT WITH BIRTHDAYS AND A SPEAKER

Our Kabbalat Shabbat at 6:00 on June 8th will celebrate the birthdays of our two fearless leaders, Jim Levinson and Paul Berch. It's Jim's "retirement birthday," so to celebrate being able now to collect Social Security, he and Louise (well, Louise really!) are preparing dinner for the congregation, and Paul and Sharon (well, Sharon really!) will supply dessert.

David Gerbi, the after-dinner speaker on June 8th, is author of a book titled *Making Peace with Qaddafi*, describing his visionary peace project which aims to heal the rift between Libya and its Jewish population. David is a Jew born in Libya; he lived there until the Arab-Israeli war 1967 when Jews, who had lived side-by-side with Arabs for centuries, were no longer welcome and the Jewish population of Libya went into exile. David, then twelve years old became a refugee, settling with his family in Italy, where he still lives.

B'NAI MITZVAH SCHEDULE

Our b'nai mitzvah "season" starts late this year and carries on into the fall. Five young people are studying hard and are looking forward to being welcomed into the congregation as responsible adults, so please mark these dates on your calendar: July 14 Margaret, August 25 Ali, September 29 Nina, October 6 Manya, October 13 Galen. Plan to be at these Shabbat services to show your support of these young adults. You will "kvell" when you see and hear them!

SAVE THE DATE!

Margaret 's Bat Mitzvah
July 14th, ten o'clock at
West Village Meeting House
Kiddush immediately following the service

CEMETERY COMMITTEE REPORT

DONATIONS AND DEDICATIONS

You may have noticed in the April and May newsletters that the “Honorable Menshen” columns were all-too short. We know there are many mensh out there and we would like to be able to honor them by “menshening” their names in this column. Please think about donations you would like to make to BAJC, at any time, in honor of a special person or a special event, or in memory of a loved one at any time, or to acknowledge a yahrzeit. A card acknowledging your gift will be sent to the appropriate person(s). You can donate any amount to a fund of your choice: building, education, cemetery, music, gifts, arts and cultural events, Torah, operating, capital, prayer book, Israel / camp scholarship, discretionary, operating, etc.

In anticipation of our congregation receiving *Mishkan Tefilah*, our new siddur, this coming fall, several people have made donations to have a prayer book dedicated and inscribed. A number of books are still available for dedication, at \$36 each. If you donated in years past for *Gates of Prayer*, you might want to see your dedication repeated in the new siddur. Simply send a check to BAJC for the prayer book fund and let us know what you wish the inscription(s) to say.

Your Cemetery Committee has been hard at work, taking care of the details needed to insure that you and your family will have a beautifully maintained cemetery and that we have the ability to work with each family – with care, with respect and with courtesy during what can be a difficult time.

We want to take a moment to review a few of the details with our membership. While we will not publish our by-laws in this newsletter because of space constraints, please do not hesitate to call the office or Norma if you would like a copy – but here are some thoughts for you to consider:

1. Is the deceased Jewish or gentile? We have two separate areas, one of which is designated for interfaith families.
2. Are you aware of some of the costs? The plot itself ranges from \$500 for members and their immediate family, \$1000 for extended family of members and \$2000 for non-members. There are also costs for a casket, footstone, headstone (optional), digging the grave, and funeral home services. There are also fees for rabbinical services and building use if a funeral service is for someone who is not a member of BAJC.
3. If you have out of town family, are they aware of your wishes to be buried here? Will they know who to call? Will BAJC know who to call?
4. Did you know that our synagogue has an active Chevra Kadisha? This is a group of lay people trained in the ancient rites of traditional Jewish burial practices. For more information, contact info@bajcvermont.org.

Please don't put off having a candid conversation with your family about this important life cycle event. Don't leave them guessing about what you would want them to do; death can be so difficult that they, or you, don't need the added burden of difficult details that could have been decided ahead of time. Members of the cemetery committee are very happy to answer any questions you may have about our cemetery, but if you have questions of a theological nature or queries about Jewish custom and tradition, we ask that you speak directly with Jim Levinson. We work closely with one another and will do everything we can to help you and your family.

BAJC SUMMER CAMP SCHOLARSHIP

If your child is going to a URJ summer camp, there is a small scholarship available from the Redstone Scholarship Fund. Send a note to Norma Redstone Shakun (info@bajcvermont.org) giving her the child's name, age, which camp, what dates; parents' names and contact information.

A SUMMER OF SINGING AT THE NORTH AMERICAN JEWISH CHORAL FESTIVAL

Summer is a beautiful time to sing! Join hundreds of other professionals and music lovers for the *chai* anniversary of the annual North American Jewish Choral Festival. This four-day conference brings the world's best Jewish choral voices to Kerhonkson, NY. From morning until night you will sing and learn the newest trends and classic melodies of Jewish choral music. For more information, please contact the Department of Worship, Music and Religious Living at 212.650.4193 or worship@urj.org.

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.

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

Board of Trustees

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Laura Berkowitz
Sandra Brodsky
Martin Cohn
Mary Copans
Linda Heimerdinger
Johnny Lee Lenhart
Marjorie Pivar
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President: Paul Berch
Vice-president: Julie Strothman
Treasurer: Randy Terk
Secretary: Laura Berkowitz

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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.)