

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



Congregation Shir HeHarim  
Brattleboro Area Jewish Community  
PO Box 2353  
Brattleboro, VT 05303

## The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

November 2007

CHESVAN — KISLEV 5768

### FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

This is another time in the life of BAJC when it seems that, everywhere we look, there are congregants taking creative initiatives on behalf of our congregation. Marty, Faith and I counted 45 different people working together on our fabulously successful Israel film festival which will be continuing through the year. For our joint S'lichot service with the Keene congregation, the High Holidays, Sukkot and Simchat Torah, a very large number of congregants led prayers and Torah study, greeted guests, set up and cleaned up. During this period we also had four b'nai mitzvah, each of them unique, each of them requiring the efforts of a cadre of committed persons. Then our interfaith events relating both to justice and to music had yet other committed persons involved.

Meanwhile, our Hebrew School and award-winning adult education programs and our women's programs continue to grow and flourish, while new initiatives like our mikveh development ready to take off. The kind of activity we see at BAJC flies in the face of the recent national survey of American rabbis indicating that less than half are optimistic about the future of American Jewry and about synagogue membership, citing again and again the battle to keep Judaism relevant.

All of this activity also reinforces the idea I find so compelling — that individuals among us in a congregation like BAJC can make our “home base” in any one of at least four homes (or rooms) within a home: in our Beit T'filah, our “prayer house,” in our Beit Midrash, our “learning house,” in our Beit K'nisset, our “community gathering house,” or in our Beit Tzedek, our “justice house.” Unlike earlier periods of Judaism when one had to begin with the first of these, it's now possible for us to make our initial, and perhaps our primary connection with Judaism in any of these home bases. But then, once there, it becomes possible, and sometimes

inevitable, that we'll become intrigued also with at least one of the other “home bases.”

We might begin with social justice, but then find a community of kindred spirits evolving that leads us to the Beit Knesset. Similarly we might begin in the Beit Knesset, but then become intrigued with the history of our worship, or with the melodies or with the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic practices, and then, before we know it, we're in the Beit Midrash.

Let me conclude by passing on some very special thanks received by Paul Capcara, the Executive Director of Morningside Shelter. Our contributions, he told me, have been manifold and substantial over recent years. He told me that a good number of them were from individuals and families that, while identifying themselves with our congregation, sought to remain anonymous (the highest form of tzedakah.)

We may be called upon to help further this winter with physical, as well as financial assistance, given the looming homelessness crisis in our area.

B'Shalom,  
Jim



### 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.

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

Jim Levinson writes eloquently in this newsletter of the joy that we take as a congregation when individuals make BAJC their home base for meaningful Jewish-related activities. He notes in his opening comments that ‘everywhere we look, there are congregants taking creative initiatives....’

I would like to take a few moments to look at these initiatives from a slightly different, yet equally important perspective. I have written often of the value of membership to the member as well as to BAJC. One of these benefits is the opportunity to be part of working committees, which organize and promote the varied activities which we all find so memorable. Our successful Israeli Film and Food Festival, which followed our moving Dedication a year earlier, was indeed helped by many willing hands, yet neither would have occurred without the dedicated efforts of committees tasked with seeing that these events come to pass. Our Ritual Committee works hard to assure that our Shabbat services, our holiday services, our High Holiday Services and our ritual practices are the best that we can offer. Our Fundraising Committee has put on special events year after year to bridge the gap between what our dues raise and what our Congregation needs to operate. Our Education Committee not only transitioned our school and our kids from a temporary building to our own Shul without significant disruption, but deals with the ongoing challenges of growth and space, and of methods and curriculum. Our Social Action Committee seeks to help heal the world – the world in our Brattleboro area as well as the global world. We have large committees (Membership) and small subcommittees (What Do We Do with the Barns Subcommittee). We have permanent committees (Rabbi Liaison) and temporary committees (Reform of Dues Subcommittee).

I speak of committees for several reasons. First, we want to recreate our Sunshine Committee. This is highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter. Part of what we do and part of who we are is that we try to maintain contact with those that need a call, a visit, a card or a similar “touch”. We need a group who will help with this mitzvah. For those of you considering a greater involvement with BAJC, this is a wonderful opportunity.

In a larger sense, our committees are the places where much of the “work” of BAJC gets done. It is also where enduring friendships are established; where the nuts and bolts of building an enduring spiritual community are put together; and one of the

places where, in the words of our mission statement, “...we foster Jewish pride and identity by participating together in religious, spiritual, educational, social and cultural experiences”.

I lived some years ago in Chicago, where I would visit from time to time the magnificent Baha’i House of Worship in a nearby suburb. A gleaming white stone temple, it has nine sides with nine entrances. There are many doorways to rooms of spirit, to rooms of social action, and to rooms of learning. The doors at BAJC are open and welcoming. Please consider entering one of the doors by joining a committee and sharing your spirit and energy.

B’ Shalom,  
Paul

## CULTURE CONNECTION

“Culture Connect” will connect you with lots of interesting events going on in the Pioneer Valley and southern Vermont area. Check out [http://www.hgf.org/culture\\_connect/events.php#537](http://www.hgf.org/culture_connect/events.php#537) to find out some of the lectures, concerts, plays, and other special events you can enjoy just a short drive from our area. You can also link to this site from our own BAJC website ([www.bajcvermont.org](http://www.bajcvermont.org))

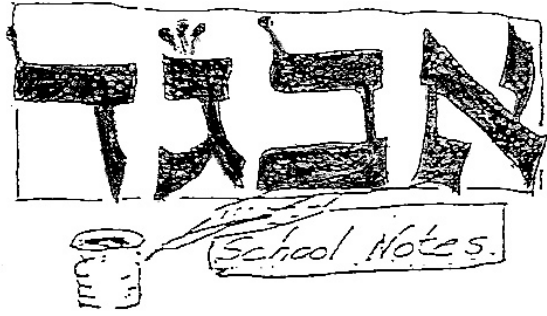


## GOODSEARCH REMINDER

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!

## GETTING MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION UP-TO-DATE

In addition to sending in your completed membership forms, please let Faith know whenever you have a change of address, a new telephone number, or a change of e-mail address. Equally important, please let Faith know when someone is ill or hospitalized, or just needs a bit of cheering up, or when there is a “mazal tov” type event occurring.



Shalom aleichem,

The time has come, dear parents, to let your children show you how well they know the Shabbat blessings! We will be sending home a “Shabbat Kit” – just add bread and juice or wine – to get you started if you haven’t already. Again, feel free to make this little ceremony your own. Last week at my house, we said the motzi over a pizza – you do what you can!

On Friday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, the students of Kita Aleph and Dalet will demonstrate their knowledge of many parts of the evening service. Everyone is encouraged to attend to kvell!

#### **News from Kita Aleph, Judith’s class**

Kita Aleph (First Grade) is enjoying the New Year by celebrating out of doors. The kids are ecstatic to have discovered the “climbing tree” and the “swinging tree” and the stream that runs on the BAJC property. On that very first day, we threw stones and sticks into the flowing water as a way of seeing our *khaitz* (unkind acts) taken away. Ever since, we have gone down to the “river” to see the beauty and the wildness of our woods and to look for *shretalech*, the mystical Jewish equivalent of elves who live in the woods. Judith learned about them from the David Arfa, the visiting ecologist-rabbi who has conducted workshops at BAJC. The *shretalech* are quite shy, but good natured and loving and interested in us, the Big People. We discovered several tiny *shretalech sukkot* down near the river made of sticks, sycamore tree bark, grasses, and leaves, and decorated with red berries and ferns. The next week we made *sukkot* ourselves for the *shretalech*, making sure the *shretalech* would be able to see the stars through the roofs, just as we did in the big one.

We have begun to use our cool new Hebrew books. We think they are cool because they are self-paced so we can each go at our own speed AND they have the answers right in the book hidden under a flap so that we can look at the answers when we want to! We have learned three letters: *shin*, *bayt* and *tav* – so that we now are able to spell *Shabbat*!

#### **News from Kita Dalet, Mara’s class**

The students of Kita Dalet came back to school with a nearly perfect grasp of the aleph-bet and vowels

and have been able to read everything I’ve put before them. We are now reading prayers from the siddur and interpreting the meanings through our knowledge of word roots. In addition, we have also learned to greet each other in Hebrew.

We have also begun our year-long study of the Holocaust, a difficult but necessary subject. Not wanting to give your children nightmares, we will focus primarily on the history of the period, as well as stories of Jewish families who were hidden from or escaped the Nazis. These events seem so much more distant to this generation of students than they were to mine, and while many students have been able to share some of their own family’s history, the details have been sketchy. We would love to welcome any member of the community with stories to share. Help us keep these memories alive.

Again, the Hebrew School looks forward to welcoming the congregation to Friday night services on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Please bring a vegetarian dish to share. Anyone able to help either set up or clean up should contact either me or Faith.

B’Shalom,  
Mara

#### **BARN ALERT**

The next time you are at our shul, you may see notices that have been affixed to the older, dilapidated barn asking people not to enter it. Because the building is in very poor condition, the BAJC Board of Trustees elected to post these notices in an effort to avoid injury to anyone who might seek to enter it. The Board has been working hard to arrange to have the barn safely removed, but obtaining the required approval from the State of Vermont is taking a long time. In the meantime, we want to take measures to minimize the risk of injury to everyone. If you have any questions about this, contact us at [info@bajcvermont.org](mailto:info@bajcvermont.org).

#### **ISRAEL MITZVAH CORPS**

Does 10 days of travel, hands-on volunteering and social justice dialogue sound appealing? Join Reform Jews from across North America for the *Tzevet Mitzvot Yisrael* – Israel Mitzvah Corps, May 15-25, 2008. For more information, email us at [csarj@urj.org](mailto:csarj@urj.org) or call 212-650-4160. For more information and updates on other Mitzvah Corps opportunities please visit [www.urj.org/csa/mitzvahcorps](http://www.urj.org/csa/mitzvahcorps).

## CONGREGATION OF LEARNERS AWARD

“Congratulations! Congregation Shir Heharim has been selected as a winner of the 2007 Union of Reform Judaism Congregation of Learners award competition! Your outstanding array of adult Jewish programming demonstrates the learning process at its best. Offering both intellectual and spiritual opportunities for all levels of learners, your congregation serves as an exemplar of adult study across the North American Reform Movement.”

Thus begins the letter Julie received in response to the application she put together last spring describing our congregation’s adult learning opportunities. Here is part of what Julie wrote: “Our adult learning initiatives strive to welcome diverse participants and enrich community and personal growth through deep exploration of Judaism. In 5767, Shir Heharim’s formal adult learning opportunities included three terms of four to five courses each term, as well as monthly study opportunities. Our courses generally meet weekly and are taught by passionate congregant volunteers as well as by paid scholars from the New England region. Course offerings are based on interest surveys and cover a range of subjects...”

“At the dedication of our small congregation’s new home last year... Rabbi Robert Levine of Temple Rodef Shalom (New York City) gave us a lovely compliment, calling our congregation “remarkably literate.” This is evident today. The last two years have seen a vital blossoming in inter-generational education opportunities—both formal and informal. Our identification as life-long Jewish learners has been enlivened by pervasive interest and broad participation... The growth of our formal adult learning has been inspired by the vision and dedication of our volunteer adult education coordinator, Andi Waisman, and through the help of community members who teach out of a love for their topic and a love of learning.”

“Our spirit as a congregation of learners is manifest in many ways beyond our formal offerings. In the last two years, six adults became b’nai mitzvah and five more have begun study. We have grown from six volunteer torah readers to seventeen, including three young people. In the last year, congregants initiated twice-monthly Torah study and a lively Rosh Chodesh group. Community members frequently deliver divrei torah for services. Six of our members recently attended chevra kadisha training in New Hampshire...”

“Our strengths come from proactive counterbalance to our challenges. We are not discouraged by low

turnout. Our teachers and participants consider it success to explore topics in depth with even just a few others. In 5767, forty-four synagogue members and twenty-nine non-members attended our courses. These numbers demonstrate significant interest in Jewish study and promise sustained growth. Our offerings span a broad array of subjects, including Hebrew, Jewish rituals, Shabbat, holiday observances, historical perspectives, and more...”

“Adult education enriches the life of our community. Synagogue involvement has increased due to connections made in classes. To build on these successes, we plan to continue to focus on creating access for people with varied connections to Judaism, bring in additional educators from the region, and address the interests of a wider range of congregants, from Hebrew School students to young parents and on through elders. The Board of Trustees is committed to concrete and sustainable support for adult education offerings.”

The Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning received many impressive submissions for this award, which was given to only five congregations. Notably, the other four winners are large urban congregations in Florida, California, and New York City; ours is the only small congregation and the only one from the entire northeast region! The award certificate will be presented at the URJ Biennial in San Diego in December; we will be featured in the URJ publication *Building Congregations of Learners, Best Practices in Adult Study 2007*.

Also interesting to note, this is the second prestigious national award BAJC has received, the first being the Irving J. Fain Award for Social Action, presented at the Religious Action Center (RAC) Conference in Washington, DC, in 2003 for our “exemplary social justice program for Muslim-Jewish relations.”

## TAG SALE, OF SORTS

Occasionally, members and friends of BAJC are willing to donate items to BAJC to sell to other members and friends, earning some money for BAJC’s building fund in the process. Right now there are two like-new electric typewriters with manuals, Smith Corona models 1800XL & 450DLD, a Lifecycle 5500 exercise bike with an LED display and front casters for easy moving, and some boxes of new Titleist golf balls available. Contact Faith if you are interested in any of these items.

## SPREAD A LITTLE SUNSHINE

The BAJC Sunshine Committee is reorganizing, seeking new members and a new chairperson. The purpose of this committee is to visit the sick or infirm or lonely at home or in the hospital, send cards and notes for happy occasions or to cheer up people who might need cheering up, make arrangements for transportation to services or other BAJC events for people who might not be able to drive themselves, and to spread little sunshine wherever its needed. Please contact Paul or Faith if you are interested in serving on this committee.

The other part of spreading sunshine is finding out where it is needed! Who would like a visit? Who should get a card or a phone call? Who needs help that we might be able to provide? Who has a special occasion or accomplishment to share with the congregation?

We can't visit, send a card, make a call, or wish a mazal tov if we don't know what is going on! Please contact Faith to let her know so she can share the information in the newsletter and/or have the Sunshine Committee take appropriate action.

## FURNITURE PROJECTS: A NEW ARK AND A TORAH STAND

We are hoping that among our many talented BAJC members and friends there is someone who would like to design and construct a beautiful portable ark that would fit our two Torahs but would be light and compact enough to move readily from our shul to the West Village Meeting House (or any other venue where we might be having services until the day when we have a big enough place of our own). We are asking people to submit a design to the Ritual committee and hoping that the designer (or perhaps someone else) might volunteer to do the construction. The outside dimensions should be approximately 43 inches high by 32 inches wide by 12 inches deep.

A second, simpler project would be a Torah stand to hold one Torah while another is open or to hold a Torah while the haftarah is being read. A sturdy wooden stand would hold the Torah and the crowns and breastplate so no one would have to sit holding the Torah for long periods of time during services. Like the ark, this too should be easily portable and might possibly be designed to fold flat. Please contact Marty with your questions and your ideas, or to suggest an artisan you know who might be interested in these projects.

## ARZA

ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America, is an organization that supports Reform values through the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism and the Israel Religious Action Center. ARZA's domestic agenda includes developing educational materials about Israel and Zionism, training youth and college leaders in Israel advocacy, and bringing Reform Jews to Israel; its overseas agenda includes providing significant financial aid to progressive Judaism in Israel and working for civil and religious rights for Reform Jews there. We can express our connection to Israel by joining ARZA as individuals through our congregation. You can send a \$36 check made out to BAJC, noting that it is for ARZA membership.

## THE OTHER FALL HOLIDAYS

BAJC and the Hebrew school celebrated Sukkot this year right in our sukkah, constructed by Felipe Sipowicz and decorated by the Hebrew School students. Students, parents and teachers crowded in and around the sukkah while we sang festival songs, waved the lulav and the etrog, and celebrated the Jewish Thanksgiving, after which we shared a wonderful pot-luck meal together. One of the themes of our celebration was the vulnerability symbolized by the sukkah itself – a vulnerability which isn't always a bad thing. We spoke about vulnerability as a motivation for being open with one another, and also a motivation for standing in solidarity with people all over the world who are vulnerable to poverty, disease and an absence of shelter.

Then, just three days later, our shul was bulging at the seams as we celebrated the end and beginning of the Torah cycle on Shemini Atzeret (Simchat Torah). We chanted the very last verses of the last book, *Deuteronomy*, and then we rolled the Torah back to the very beginning, *Genesis*, and chanted the first verses. While rolling, we stopped and took in the sights: the Hymn of the Sea, the Ten Commandments, the three-fold blessing, the beginning and end of each of the five Books.

A special treat this year was music provided by John and Jacob and by Mara to dress our prayers in festive holiday garb: *Mi Chamocha* to the tune of "You Send Me;" *Y'hiyu I'ratzon* to "Twist and Shout;" *Oseh Shalom* to "Blowin' in the Wind;" *Adonai S'fatai* to "I Wanna Hold Your Hand;" and the introductory Torah prayers to the music of Cole Porter. *Yasher koach* to John, Jacob, and Mara, and to Johnny Lee who both organized and participated in the Torah reading.

## KEEPING OUR HEBREW SCHOOL KIDS SAFE AND HAPPY

Hebrew school begins promptly at 3:45. Please drop your child(ren) off at the door or park your car and walk them to the door. We don't want children walking unaccompanied in the parking lot or driveway. Please be prompt also at the 5:45 pick-up time; park your car in the lot behind the barns and walk into the building to accompany your child(ren) to the car. Because it's dangerous to have kids near the driveway or parking lot when cars are pulling in and out, no child will be allowed out of the building until an adult comes inside for him/her.

Hebrew school relies on parents to keep things running smoothly, but any member of the BAJC community, parent or not, can sign up to help clean up in the kitchen after snack, to sweep the stairs and other areas where crumbs and mud have collected, or to supervise the driveway area between 5:45 and 6:00. There's a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board, or you can contact Faith to volunteer.

We want every child to have the best Hebrew school experience possible. With only two precious hours each week, we must be firm with any child whose behavior interrupts the education of others. A child who disrupts a class will be asked to leave the room for fifteen minutes (or thirty minutes if there is a second time), to be supervised by someone in another area while they do their work. Parents will be notified when this happens. After that, a parent may be asked to accompany the child in the classroom to insure good behavior. Because of our short time together, teachers are generally unable to engage in any meaningful discussion with parents before, during, or after school hours, so if there are any kinds of problems, questions, or concerns, parents should call the child's teacher or make an appointment to meet with him/her, or call Mara. In addition, a member of the education committee (Laura, Linda, Bobbe, and Faith) will be available at the school most days to chat with parents, answer questions, hear concerns (or compliments!), and serve as liaison between parents and teachers.

## NOTHING BUT NETS

With the widening issue of global poverty, many wonder how they can make a difference. *Nothing But Nets* is a global campaign to save lives and prevent the spread of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. A \$10 donation goes toward the purchase and distribution of bed nets. Make a donation. Start a net-raiser team. Save a life. Join our campaign today by visiting [www.urj.org/nets!](http://www.urj.org/nets!)

## ADULT ED CLASSES IN NOVEMBER

Please remember to pre-register for classes at least three days ahead of time. Classes will not be held if there is not adequate advance registration! The drop-in gatherings, Singing is Like Praying Twice and Torah Study, do not require pre-registration.

**Bringing Two Different Backgrounds Into One Relationship:** Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>, 11:00-1:00. This special workshop is being facilitated by Kathy Bloomfield, program ambassador for the Northeast Council of the Union for Reform Judaism outreach department, a certified URJ Outreach Fellow trained to assist individuals with their transition into Judaism.

**Exploring Judaism's Contemplative Nature Practices- Sunday November 11<sup>th</sup>, 3:00-4:30:** This rescheduled class, for adults and children 12 and over, will explore BAJC's field, forest, and stream, and will learn Judaism's many blessings for the gifts of the natural world, Abraham Joshua Heschel's theology of wonder, and the hidden landscape found in our prayers, holidays, and traditions. Contemplative practices, group discussion, deep listening, and old-fashioned text study will aid our journey. This workshop will be led by David Arfa, a storyteller and environmental educator dedicated to Judaism's storytelling heritage and ancient environmental wisdom.

Other classes in November:

- Kabbalah Study: Nov. 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 7:30-9:00
- The Basics of Yiddish: Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>; 7:30-9:00
- Singing is like Praying Twice: Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, 7:00
- Torah Study: Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am
- Chanukah Workshop: Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-4:00

## THE PJ LIBRARY

Sign up with the Grinspoon Foundation for a year of high quality, age-appropriate children's books or CDs, sent every month (free!) to children ages six months to six years. Reading bedtime stories and listening to music with your child are powerful and nurturing experiences; the PJ Library can provide Jewish experiences with books and music that will enrich your Jewish family relationships.

In the synagogue we have samples of some of the books, along with brochures and sign-up cards you can mail to register for a year of free books, or you can register online at [www.pjlibrary.org](http://www.pjlibrary.org). This offer is available to BAJC members and to non-members alike. Tell your friends with young children about this wonderful opportunity—one too good to pass up!

## **HEBREW CALIGRAPHY – OPEN STUDIO**

Peggy Davis, Hebrew calligrapher, invites you to visit her studio and new gallery as part of the Crafts of Colrain studio tour on November 11, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Peggy will demonstrate lettering throughout the day. A variety of inspirational work will be on exhibit and for sale, as well as Wholesale Klezmer Band CDs and Yiddish song CDs. Children welcome. For a brochure and map call 413-624-3204 or visit the website [www.Crafts of Colrain.com](http://www.Crafts of Colrain.com) . If you can't come, visit her website [www.HebrewLettering.com](http://www.HebrewLettering.com).

## ***FREE! A WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER OF 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](http://www.urj.org/subscribe).

## 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.)