

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

January 2008

TEVET / SHEVAT 5768

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

I had the opportunity to participate in our Hebrew School Chanukah celebration and once again was struck by what an extraordinary Hebrew School we have – and what a literate one! Mara was tossing questions at these kids I never could have answered at their ages – but there were our kids with hands waving in the air, all eager to answer. And there were Judith and Jackie and David to add in their thoughtful commentary.

Thinking back to my own Hebrew School education, I have to acknowledge that the experience was drudgery, and that I learned remarkably little (and many of us who are now parents, I'm guessing, would agree). For some of us, in fact, the experience was so negative that we may have wondered if we'd ever have anything to do with Jewish education or, for that matter, Judaism again. Fortunately, things are better today, not only in our shul but generally among Jewish congregations in this country. Hebrew School education, and not simply Hebrew day schools, finally is beginning to get the attention it deserves, with Jewish federations contributing substantial funds and issuing valuable taskforce reports. One of the primary findings from these taskforce reports is something that we at BAJC discovered some time ago – a Hebrew School will be much more effective if it is part of a congregation-wide focus on education and not an isolated piece for children only. One particular critic of Hebrew education in America has written that "our teachers are probably better trained than they've ever been, and there is probably better curriculum material than ever, but the Hebrew School experience doesn't make it unless it's part of a broader congregational premium on learning." In our congregation, this is

happily the case, with our award-winning adult education, our Torah study, and our education-rich services, often with active Hebrew School participation. In addition, I continue to hear good stories about the teaching and learning that's taking place in our homes. No wonder we have been cited as "that remarkably literate congregation."

I've been so pleased not only by the growth of our Hebrew School in numbers – now *really* pushing the limits of our physical space, but also by its diversity, *and* by the degree of parental participation. I counted no fewer than 20 parents in attendance at the Chanukah celebration, all of them as engaged in Mara's creative agenda and the kids' responsiveness as I was.

Mazal Tov to all of you who have been involved in this terrific program. As I'm fond of saying, this is the first Hebrew School I've yet encountered to which I'd send my own kids!

B'Shalom,
Jim

BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS

You may have noticed some changes if you look at the BAJC Directory on the back page of your newsletter. The bad/sad news is the Julie Strothman has resigned as both the BAJC Vice-President and as a Board member. It is with great regret that the Board has accepted her resignation. The good news is that Linda Heimerdinger has agreed to accept the position of Vice-President and that Allen Ross has accepted a position on the Board of Trustees.

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

Our Spiritual Leader, Jim Levinson, devotes his column this month to our Hebrew School and to our overall education program. I would like to expand on a few points that he raises. Jim notes two aspects of our Hebrew School: engaged and diverse children, parents and educators; and the limits of our physical space. In other words, our successes so far are both pleasing and challenging! I believe we have the resources to meet the challenges.

Our needs are becoming clearer. We must move toward building a larger structure for both worship and education. If we don't enlarge our physical space, we will have to begin to limit activities and goals, slowing down the very successes we have had since being in our own home. We would not want to have to close our Hebrew school registration after the first fifty students have signed up. We want to be able to provide education for each and every interested student, and we would prefer not to have to schedule Hebrew school classes on two different afternoons because we can't accommodate all the kids on the same day. We don't want to have to limit adult classes and activities. We don't want to have to rent outside space for life-cycle events, holiday celebrations, social activities, and high holy days. We don't want to be so crowded in our space that we can't enjoy being together for services, potlucks, and other events.

If we wish to expand Jewish education and Jewish activity in our region, we will have to expand our useable space. That means a capital campaign; that means volunteers raising money; that means digging deep into our own pockets; that means seeking grants; that means more of what we have already spent many years doing in order to have a synagogue of our own. A successful capital campaign will mean we can continue doing what we have started, and it will also mean that we will be able to educate and serve more of our community, both adults and children, in more diverse ways. We will be able to celebrate more life cycle events together as a community in our own space. We can become a community center for varied activities, unconstrained by space limitations.

Yet space is only one problem. With the growing number of people who have been touched and are being touched by our efforts, we need to develop and implement a vision of how BAJC is to grow. We need to address questions of curriculum, interaction with other Jewish programs and communities. We need to appeal to organizations such as the Grinspoon Foundation to support our growth. We need to

structure committees that respond to the needs of students, parents, educators, singles, and empty-nesters alike. Finally, we need to create processes and methods so that our congregants, young and old, have a meaningful path to follow in the continuing life of both our congregation and the larger Jewish community.

I am most appreciative of parents of Hebrew School kids as well as the young adults and the teachers and the volunteers who contribute their wisdom, talents and energy to our educational journey. If you have been a participant in any of our programs, please consider using your energy to help us meet the challenges of the present and to develop and implement our dreams for the future.

B' Shalom,
Paul

JANUARY KABBALAT SHABBAT

The January 11th Kabbalat Shabbat will be a 6:00 family service with participation by the students in Jackie's, Emily's, and David's classes. Please bring a dairy or vegetarian dish to share and some finger-food dessert for the potluck dinner following the service.

ISRAELI FILM CLUB SHOWING "USHPIZIN"

Shuli Rand, the 2004 Best Actor award winner of the Israeli Film Academy, stars in "Ushpizim," a film about a couple in Jerusalem's orthodox neighborhood one Sukkot. Moshe and Mali, married nearly five years and childless, are broke and praying for a miracle. Suddenly, miracles abound: a friend finds Moshe a sukkah he says is abandoned and Moshe is the beneficiary of local charitable fundraising. When two guests (ushpizin) arrive on Moshe and Mali's doorstep, troubles begin. Rabbinical advice, absolution, an effort to avoid anger, and a 1000-shekel citron figure in Moshe's dark night of the soul.

See the film at 4:00 on Sunday, the 27th, in our shul. Popcorn and soda will be available.



ALMOST INFINITE SHALOMS

Stuart Copans has been working for several years on a papercut project, "1296 Shaloms." Eighteen of them will be exhibited at the Windham Gallery in their January "Black and White Show,

with the opening at Gallery Walk on the first Friday night this month.

WISH YOU WERE HERE

Somebody asked me, four days after Abe and I returned from the URJ Biennial in San Diego, if we had come back down to earth yet, and I had to say that we were still “on a cloud” from the amazingly uplifting experience, and that we wanted to stay on that cloud for as long as we could. Being together with more than five thousand Jews from all over the United States and from Canada, Australia, and several other countries, learning, praying, singing, dining, shopping, and chatting as if we had known each other for a long time was a transformative experience. The days were filled with learning and the nights were filled with music; Shabbat was truly the special day of prayer, rest, and learning it is supposed to be, reluctantly brought to a close by the poignant blessings of Havdallah. There was an exhibition hall filled with Judaica—art, crafts, books, jewelry, tapestries, etc. There were inspiring speakers: Michael J. Fox touched our hearts with his hope that our individual and collective efforts will make a difference when we pursue the mitzvah of healing; Professor Jeffrey Sachs spoke about the ability actually within our means to eradicate world poverty in our lifetime; Ron Wolfson, co-founder of Synagogue 3000, an organization dedicated to synagogue revitalization, told us that we are here on earth to work on the “to-do” list God has left for us; Rabbi Eric Yoffie, head of the URJ, proposed dialogue with moderate Muslims in America, including a pilot program pairing synagogues and mosques for discussion groups, and he called for increased Shabbat observance, with a focus on revitalizing the morning prayer service and making the ideal Sabbath a full 24-hour experience, noting that keeping one day a week holy is the heart of Judaism; the Israeli ambassador to the United States told us how important we are to Israel and how much they need our strong support to accomplish changes that will effect a more progressive Judaism in Israel; the President of the Islamic Society of North America assured us that there are moderate Muslims who wish to live in peace alongside non-Muslims and that her society is committed to that goal.

Inspirational and educational speeches aside, it is worth the trip to the Biennial for the music alone—choral, instrumental, solo, groups, sing-alongs, Jewish gospel, rock, spiritual, Hebrew, English, in prayer services, in workshops, at meals...music everywhere. The only thing better than the music is the services, and that’s probably because there’s so much music in the services! Our only regrets are that more folks from our own congregation were not there with us, and that our teens are not connected to

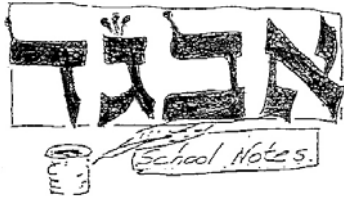
NFTY, which is a vibrant, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable force at the Biennial and in the Reform movement. We hope that many of you will make it to the URJ Northeast Regional Biennial—next October 24-26 in nearby Albany, NY. There will be several hundred people there, rather than several thousand, but they will be your “neighbors” from Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, and northeastern New York. Albany is just a short drive away rather than a long, expensive flight, and the Biennial there will be just as inspiring, educational, and enjoyable as San Diego was. Save the date and save some money for a wonderful weekend “vacation” in October.

HOW TO STAY SAFE

Far be it from your editors to create fear in your lives, but facts are facts and we think we owe it to you to share the following statistics. Many of you will question the truthfulness of any statistic, but we are concerned about your safety and the safety of your children, family and friends, so please read this slowly and consider how you can stay safe in the world today

1. Avoid riding in automobiles because they are responsible for 20% of all fatal accidents.
2. Do not stay at home because 17% of all accidents occur in the home. (That's 37 % already)
3. Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks because 14 % of all accidents occur to pedestrians. (Now we're up to 51%)
4. Avoid traveling by air, rail, or water because 16 % of all accidents involve these forms of transportation. (That's 67%)
5. Of the remaining 33%, 32% of all deaths occur in hospitals. Above all else, avoid hospitals!

You will be pleased to learn that only 0.01% of all deaths occur in a synagogue, and these are usually related to pre-existing physical disorders. Therefore logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is in synagogue services. Torah Study is even safer. The number of deaths during Torah Study is too small a number to register at all. So, stay alive and safe by going to shul as often as possible, and attend Torah Study whenever it is offered!



Shalom aleichem,

Surprise! Classes Bet and Gimmel have different students now than at the beginning of our semester, depending on who studied what last year! Over the course of the first months of school, Emily, Mara and Jackie realized that with class sizes smaller than anticipated, we had an imbalance of students and different levels of readiness as well, so we decided to adjust our subject matter and goals to the needs and abilities of the students. Emily will teach "Creation" to "Sinai," to those students who have not yet studied early Bible stories, using hands-on activities and lots of guided movement appropriate for the "youngsters." Jackie will continue with the "olders" and move on to Prophets, discussing "What is a prophet? What made the prophets different from the rest of us?" and from there discovering how prophets played a role in keeping Judaism true to its roots in historical and biblical context. As we understand more about what the prophets thought and did, we will ask ourselves and each other, "Do we have any current prophets in our world today? In Judaism?" As in so much of our Jewish studies, we hope that students will come to realize that there are many answers to one question, and many ways to get to the answers!

Both classes, Bet and Gimmel, will continue with Hebrew study, with Bet focusing on letters and sounds and Gimmel beginning to read prayer vocabulary. Both classes will identify common objects in the Jewish world, labeling all kinds of objects, both secular and ritual, throughout our shul so that everyone can learn along with us! All of this provides the reading readiness that is required to decode prayers as students move closer to the B'nai Mitzvah Class.

David has an amazing class of mostly 10 and 11 year olds. His helper this year is Rebecca Sullum, an Israeli graduate student who has been helping teach the students conversational Hebrew and Israeli culture and adding an authentic dimension to our learning about the Middle East. During the first half of class concentration is on Hebrew, reviewing letter and vowel recognition and pronunciation. Students have become familiar with blessings over different kinds of food and have explored what it means to bless and what it means to be thankful. Although they continue to have difficulty with vowels, similar looking letters and reading efficiency, with only one hour of Hebrew a week, they are doing a great job.

The second hour of the class focuses on history and

culture. Thanks to Rebecca, we had a visit from an Israeli soldier who trains dogs for the Israeli army. He showed pictures and explained what the army was like, then taught the kids the Hebrew commands he uses with the dogs. Another time we created the experience of shopping in a shuk (an open-air market) using shekels and food items in a market scene the kids created in the classroom. We also saw pictures given to us by John's relatives in Jerusalem showing preparation for Sukkot, and Rebecca was able to describe all the hustle and bustle that happens in Israel during that festive time of year. David's class will be exploring more about the history of Israel and present-day issues as the year progresses.

Please mark your calendars and join us on January 11th, when the kids of Jackie's, Emily's, and David's classes will be leading the Friday night service and potluck.

B'shalom,
Mara

ADULT CLASSES AND EVENTS IN JANUARY

Please register for adult ed classes on our website

Four Amazing Women and the State of Israel: 7:00-9:00 on January 8, 15, 22, and 29, taught by Vikki Dunn.

Basics of Yiddish: 7:30-9:30 on January 9, 16, 23, 20, taught by Sylvia Morey.

Kabbalat Shabbat--Welcoming the Sabbath: 7:00-8:30 on January 20, 27, and Feb. 3, taught by Ari Reis.

Study of the Te'amim (Torah Trope): eight weeks beginning on January 28th, time to be determined, taught by Johnny Lee Lenhart.

"Drop-in" Classes (no pre-registration necessary): Torah study, 10:00 a.m. on January 12 and 26'; Singing is Like Praying Twice, 7:00 p.m. on January 9; Israeli Film Club at 4:00 on January 27.

Israeli Film Club: January 27th, 4:00

Significant Jewish Books Club: 6:30; late in January—exact date to be announced; contact Faith if you are interested in joining (info@baicvermont.org or 464-2632)

FUNDRAISING FOR THE CUBA TRIP

Much interest has been expressed within our community about participating in BAJC's trip to Cuba. It has become clear that fundraising is needed to support this journey. A 'Salsa music and Cuban meal' event for the entire family is being planned for early Spring. If you are interested in learning to cook delicious Cuban black beans, yucca root, sweet plantains, while supporting BAJC's Social Action project, here's a perfect opportunity to have fun and help with this first of what we hope will be a series of trips to Cuba.

For this event, we need helpers to shop for food in Hartford or New York, cooks, servers, publicity, set-up and clean-up crews. Eugene Uman, Director of the Vermont Jazz Center is collaborating on music. This is sure to be an event we all will enjoy!! Contact Teresa to let her know where you are interested in assisting. More details about the event will follow soon.

The first trip to Cuba is tentatively scheduled for April 21-29, 2008. Plans are to spend time in the country side and to connect with several small, rural Jewish communities that don't usually get many visitors but are very excited to meet us and get to know us! Many folks are working on different parts of the organizing, including fundraising, travel arrangements and itinerary. For more info folks can contact Judy

GOODSEARCH REMINDER

Everything you ever wanted to know from Google, you can learn from Goodsearch in the same one click. If you click on Goodsearch.com and indicate that your charity is Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, we will earn money from every click! (Not so on Google!) We get a penny per click and, if everyone would Goodsearch, BAJC could earn hundreds of dollars a year!

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.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO APPLY FOR BRONFMAN YOUTH FELLOWSHIPS IN ISRAEL

The Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel are looking for outstanding Jewish teenagers from the United States and Canada, coming from diverse backgrounds and entering the twelfth grade of school, to spend five weeks of study, dialogue and travel in Israel, with all expenses paid, including roundtrip transportation between New York and Israel, educational programming, room and board, and travel in Israel. The Bronfman Fellows will be selected on the basis of character, intellectual interests, special talents and leadership qualities; they are looking for candidates from the widest possible variety of Jewish backgrounds, ranging from the unaffiliated to those with extensive Jewish experience. Fellowship activities begin June 30th, with a return from Israel on August 6th. All meals will be kosher, and Sabbath activities will be in keeping with the sanctity of the day. While in Israel, the Fellows will engage in an intense interaction with a pluralistic faculty of master educators, representing a wide range of Jewish perspectives. They will explore Jewish texts against the background of Israel's land, culture and customs, meet with Amitei Bronfman, our parallel Israeli Fellowship, and take part in seminars with some of the country's leading political and cultural figures. They will debate a constant flow of ideas and search for insights on the various ways to define oneself as a Jew today - all in an atmosphere of mutual respect and open dialogue. Upon returning home, the Fellows participate in a series of seminars, a weekend with the Israeli Fellows, and a wide range of alumni activities, programs and projects, all aimed at promoting our goals of commitment, pluralism, study and dialogue. For many Fellows, the summer in Israel is just the beginning of a lifelong association with fellow "Bronfmanim." For an online application and brochure visit www.bronfman.org or contact BYFI directly: The Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel, 163 Delaware Ave., Suite 102, Delmar, NY 12054. Telephone: 518 475-7212, Fax: 518 475-7207, E-mail: info@byfi.org, Website: www.bronfman.org. COMPLETED APPLICATIONS MUST BE POSTMARKED BY JANUARY 15, 2008.

RABBI ERIC YOFFIE CALLS FOR INCREASED SHABBAT OBSERVANCE IN REFORM MOVEMENT

SAN DIEGO, Dec. 15, 2007—Almost 150 years ago the founder of the Reform Movement transformed American Jewry by moving the major Shabbat worship service to Friday night, thus accommodating Jews who had to work on Saturday. Today the president of the Union for Reform Judaism began another major transformation, calling for a renewal of communal Shabbat morning worship and encouraging Jews to observe a full 24-hour day of rest.

In his Shabbat morning sermon at the Union's Biennial convention, Rabbi Eric Yoffie told the 5,000 worshippers that Friday night prayer would remain vitally important, but that it was time to reclaim Shabbat morning worship, which too often has become a private ceremony for the Bar and Bat Mitzvah families.

"Our members who come to pray with the community often sit in the back of the sanctuary and feel like interlopers in their own congregation," he said. "On Erev Shabbat, we invite members in, but on Shabbat morning, we drive them away."

Yoffie, who started a revolution in Reform worship eight years ago when he asked congregational leaders to transform their Shabbat worship, said, "As proud as we are of this dramatic transformation, now is the time to step back and to see what remains undone."

There is in the Reform Movement a new openness to observing a weekly day of rest, he said, proposing a two-pronged approach affecting both the individual Reform Jew and Reform congregations.

"Reform Jews are considering Shabbat because they need Shabbat," he said. "In our 24/7 culture, the boundary between work time and leisure time has been swept away, and the results are devastating. Do we really want to live in a world where we make love in half the time and cook every meal in the microwave?"

"When work expands to fill all our evenings and weekends, everything suffers, including our health," he said. "For our stressed-out, sleep-deprived families, the Torah's mandate to rest looks relevant and sensible."

"We are asked to put aside those Blackberries and stop gathering information, just as the ancient Israelites stopped gathering wood. We are asked to stop running around long enough to see what God is doing."

Yoffie acknowledged that most Reform Jews are not yet ready to embrace a Shabbat that is separate and distinct from the rest of the week, "but our research indicates that we have more closet Shabbat observers than we realize," he said. A recent survey by the Research Network of Tallahassee, FL, of more than 12,000 Reform Jews showed that 46 percent refrain from money-earning work on Shabbat and 39 percent

try to make Shabbat a special day.

Yoffie said the Shabbat observance he envisions "will *not* mean some kind of neo-*frumkeit*; it will not mean the Shabbat of eighteenth-century Europe; it will not mean an endless list of Shabbat prohibitions.

"It will mean instead approaching Shabbat with the creativity that has always distinguished Reform Judaism. It will mean emphasizing the 'Thou shalt's' of Shabbat—candles and *Kiddush*, rest and study, prayer and community—rather than the 'Thou shalt not's,'" he said.

"The glory of Reform Judaism has always been its ability to reinvent itself to meet new spiritual situations." Recalling that Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of the Reform Movement in America introduced the late Friday service in 1869, Yoffie said, "Because many Jews worked on Saturday, it literally saved Shabbat for the Jewish community. No other Reform innovation has had such long-lasting success."

Yoffie acknowledged that changing the Shabbat morning worship will be difficult, in part because the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony is for many parents their most meaningful congregational experience. But too often, "worship of God gives way to worship of the child," he said, railing at the "king" or "queen" for a day character of many services.

He noted, however, that there are congregations that have succeeded in changing their Shabbat morning worship, examples of which are included in the prepared materials. (See note to editor)

In challenging congregations to move forward with these initiatives, Yoffie suggested two approaches: the appointment of a Shabbat Morning Task Force to study and recommend how Shabbat morning worship might be reimagined, and the formation of a second group, a Shabbat *Chavurah*, that will come together for three to four months to create a Shabbat observance in an authentically Reform way. The Union has prepared study guides for both groups, a Shabbat website (www.urj.org/shabbat) that will be regularly updated with new suggestions for the individual and the congregation, and a Shabbat blog (www.blogs.rj.org/shabbat/) where individuals can write about what Shabbat means to them and how they are trying to increase their observance of a day of rest.

"Renewing some form of regular Shabbat observance among the members of our Movement will take time, and what we are proposing is only the first step," he said. "But surely we must begin. Shabbat, after all, is not just a nice idea. It is a Jewish obligation and one of the Ten Commandments—indeed the longest and most detailed of them all."

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.)