

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

February 2008

SHEVAT / ADAR I 5768

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

In just the past month, we've had three individuals or households come to our shul having earlier been made to feel unwelcome at another shul or having been alienated from a Jewish congregation. Of course we are always pleased to have new people join us, but, at the same time, are troubled whenever anyone is estranged from a synagogue. It's not like walking out of a town meeting. We are meant to be faith communities of kindred spirits--shul should be all about welcome, shared heritage, and shared experience.

How is it that this alienation happens (of course not only in Jewish congregations)? My experience and reading suggests that it's sometimes about the absence of welcoming itself. The URJ, aware of this issue, has put together a set of exercises for congregations having difficulty with this. It begins with something as simple as making sure that a newcomer is greeted, introduced around, made to feel at home, and invited to come again. Being a welcoming congregation also requires understanding why some people have become alienated from synagogue life.

Sometimes the estrangement has to do with acrimony over life cycle rituals. Many will remember the story of William Cohen from Maine who was Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration. Cohen, whose mother had been Catholic, had a conversion ceremony at the time of his Brit Milah, grew up as a Jew, attended Hebrew School from the age of six, and wore a "chai" around his neck. Shortly before his Bar Mitzvah, the rabbi told Cohen his earlier conversion "wasn't enough," and indicated that an additional drop of blood would

have to be extracted from a private part. The boy went to his father, who told him he didn't have to do it. Cohen then tore off his "chai," threw it into the Penobscot River, and never wanted to have anything to do with Judaism again.

Frequently the estrangement has to do with rituals surrounding the deaths of loved ones. You may recall the story of two Jewish siblings who had become closely bonded after living through pogroms in Russia as children. Many decades later, the sister died while traveling abroad and was cremated. The family held on to the ashes; then when the brother died, the family asked that a small portion of the sister's ashes, properly contained, be buried in the grave with her brother so "they could be together again." The congregation's Board refused. The family left that congregation.

Of course Jewish congregations, like all organizations, need to have rules. We always hope these rules will be as "user friendly" as possible but, when a problem arises, it's the responsibility of those of us in the congregation to bend over backwards to be sympathetic, to examine the issue carefully, and to search for an accommodation that will leave behind only winners.

I like to think that we at BAJC do that pretty well. I see among us members who had sworn, after earlier negative experiences, that they'd never join a Jewish congregation again. These persons have been drawn to us not only because of our national social justice award or our national adult education award or our extraordinary literacy or our creative and moving Torah services or our heavenly musical harmonies, but also because we have made them feel so welcome. Yasher koach.

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

In the spring of 2008/5768, we will celebrate the 60th year of Jewish sovereignty in the land and State of Israel. There is much to celebrate and much to think about. The relationship between Jews in the diaspora and Israelis (Jewish and non-Jewish) is both complex and simple, strong and fragile.

Jews everywhere celebrate the many miracles that have contributed to the creation and maintenance of a vibrant, democratic, involved and passionate country whose independence was achieved 60 years ago. Sharon and I (along with Abe and Faith Schuster) were blessed with the opportunity to visit Israel this past year. We were impressed above all by the vibrancy of the Israelis and the passion with which they live their lives. Yet we could not fail to see the fault lines – physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual -- that threaten this country and this land. Like all of creation, Israel's creation is a dynamic process, with its final contours hidden in the future. Israel's Declaration of Independence calls for both a State for the Jews and a Jewish state. There is much to be done there to achieve a progressive and compassionate society. Issues in Israel go far beyond the overriding issue of its physical survival in hostile surroundings. Can Israel create harmony and commonality between the various factions of Jews, from the ultra-orthodox to the fully secular, and those in-between? Can special privileges now afforded to one bloc or another be realigned so that there is equality of opportunity as well as equality of burden-sharing? Can the differing branches of Judaism exist as co-equal, with mutual respect and mutual support? Of no less importance is the relationship between the 80% Israeli Jewish population and the 20% Israeli Arab population. Can Arab Israelis be expected to be loyal and patriotic citizens of Israel if there is evidence that they are treated as second-class citizens? Finally, any discussion of the fault lines in Israel has to mention the need for a leadership transformation that will give the government the courage and ability to confront, discuss, and address social issues that are apparent to all, in addition to dealing with the need to keep Israel safe.

The events that began sixty years ago are still unfolding. We do not yet know the full impact the creation of the State of Israel will have on Judaism worldwide. Clearly the mere fact that Israel exists profoundly affects us, individually and collectively. Changes in Israel – politically, culturally,

and religiously – affect us even in this small corner of the world. I believe that the existence of the State of Israel will continue to challenge us, our children and our children's children.

The Reform movement, struggling for its own place in the religious and political life of Israel, is a strong voice in support of progressive change in Israel. The Union for Reform Judaism and the Association of Reform Zionists of America strongly celebrate the accomplishments of the past sixty years and offer continuing support and encouragement to the goal of having a democratic, pluralistic and just society in Israel. I hope that we in the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community will lend our voices (and our money) to support progressive Judaism in Israel.

B' Shalom,
Paul

GOOGLE VS. GOODSEARCH

BAJC recently received a second check from Goodsearch.com. It was not a large check, but it's better than the NO check from Google! If you all would do your internet searches on Goodsearch.com you will get the same results as you get on Google and BAJC will earn a penny for every click. Those pennies can add up to a nice amount of income for us!

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.



Shalom aleichem,

Every class has now had a chance to lead a Friday night service and what a noisy-wonderful thing it has been. The kids are off to a great start, having learned many of the blessings. They will begin working on the Mourners Kaddish and Friday Night Kiddush during the second semester. Families are always welcome to Friday nights, whether or not the Hebrew School is taking over the service. Individual kids are welcome to lead a prayer or song even at a "non-Hebrew school" service. On those "family service" nights, when we also share potluck supper, Jim usually tells a story in lieu of a sermon or dvar torah, perfect for the young people who are attending. (Note: If you're looking for a more sedate service, there's always the Fourth Friday Kabbalat Shabbat at 7:30.)

This month the Hebrew School will begin an exploration of Life Cycle events, starting with birth. As part of this activity, Jim will lead us in a real, honest-to-goodness naming ceremony whereby any child who does not currently have a Jewish name may be endowed with the name of their choice. Not only is this educational, but it is also practical, as your child will put his or her name to excellent use when he or she is called to the Torah for the first time when becoming bar- or bat-mitzvah, and on every subsequent occasion as well. A name can honor the memory of someone in your own family, or can be chosen for its meaning, perhaps some trait that your child wishes to have. My own mother named me "Bitterness" as a *kenahurra* name – to deflect the interest of the evil eye (poo, poo, poo).* So, start discussing it now, and please join us on February 11, when we will make the names official.

B'Shalom,
Mara

*poo, poo, poo, for those who have up until now been blissfully ignorant of this expression, indicates the act of spitting into the evil eye, something that should be done immediately after making any positive or optimistic statement, as in "What a beautiful child! Poo, poo, poo."

PLAN AHEAD... PRODUCE A PURIM SHPIEL

Our congregation always has a raucous and joyous time together at Purim, with wild music, costumes, all sorts of antics, and, of course, hamentaschen. Our erev Purim service and potluck will be held at 5:30 on the 13th day of Adar II, which translates this year to Thursday evening, March 20th. For this occasion, we are returning to an old Jewish tradition with a challenge to families or groups of folks (kids or adults) to compose and then perform "Purim shpiels." These Purim shpiels or plays should be no more than 3

minutes long. The subject matter, of course, should relate to Purim, but the setting can be Persia, Brooklyn, Brattleboro, the moon, or anywhere--the choice is yours. Costumes and props



are always good additions to the shpiel.

If you are interested in doing this, please e-mail Jim (<mailto:jim@bajcvermont.org>). He promises prizes for all participants! You might even want to check with Marty Cohn. Rumor has it that he has several Purim shpiels on his hard drive that he might be willing to share with interested folks.

BENEFIT CONCERT TO SUPPORT THE BRATTLEBORO OVERFLOW SHELTER

Come to the First Baptist Church on Main Street in Brattleboro at 7:30 on Saturday, February 9th, for a concert to raise money for the Brattleboro Overflow Center for people in need of shelter on these cold winter nights. The concert features Brattleboro's hot rock group, "Buddy Folly and the Experiments," a band that includes our own John Ungerleider. Donations at the door will support our town's commitment that no one will be left out in the cold this winter. Checks can be made payable to Brattleboro Drop-In Center (on memo line: Overflow Shelter); donations are tax-deductible. The concert is sponsored by the Brattleboro Area Interfaith Clergy Association.

ADULT ED IN FEBRUARY

Monthly drop-in group, **“Singing is Like Praying Twice”** on the 13th this month will focus on exploring Nusach, the traditional tunes for some of our favorite prayers, and the moods that they invoke. Kate will be leading.

Monthly drop-in **Torah study** on the 9th and the 23rd from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, led by Marty Cohn, BAJC's Ritual Committee chair and Secretary of the BAJC Board of Trustees.

Study of the Te'amim (Trope, for the reading of the Torah). Classes will be held for 8 weeks, time and place to be determined with participants. If you can read Hebrew and hold a tune, you can chant Torah. There's a not-so-secret code for the tunes called trope that is easily learned. After that, all that's left is the practice. The rewards for your efforts are many, including the satisfaction of acquiring a new skill, an ability to perform a mitzvah for your congregation, and a wonderful new dimension to your relationship with Torah. Johnny Lee Lenhart has been studying trope for over 3 years, is currently the regular Torah reader for BAJC services and has been teaching Torah and Haftarah trope to b'nai mitzvah students. He is reported to have a goal of getting every BAJC member chanting Torah. Contact Johnny Lee (257-1959 or adultlearning@bajcvermont.org) for information about the dates for the class, or to register.

Basic Judaism, four Sunday evenings, February 10th and 17th and March 2nd and 9th, from 5:00 to 6:30. Jim Levinson is leading this class, which he has taught for the past six years, always with individuals eager to learn the basics of our faith and heritage. Some of these folks have been new to Judaism, some coming back after long absences, some not Jewish at all but interested, some the spouses and partners of individuals who are Jewish. The class assumes no previous knowledge. It covers the basics of Jewish faith (how we're the same as others and how we're different and unique), of our worship, of our festivals and of our history (some wild stories you never would have heard in Hebrew School!) Come and join. Whatever your background the material is fascinating, and hopefully will provide some insight into wonders (and sometimes the mysteries) of Judaism.

Conversational Hebrew, three Wednesday evenings, March 12th, 19th, 26th, 7:00 – 9:00. Rebecca Sullum, an Israeli graduate student studying Conflict Transformation at SIT, will focus on building practical conversational Hebrew skills

for people at all levels of Hebrew language skills. Open to suggestions from participants, Rebecca will structure each lesson to a different topic, such as current events, shopping, and meeting and greeting. Rebecca has been working in informal Jewish education for the past seven years and is a welcome addition to our Hebrew school and our community this year.

Please register for adult ed classes on our website or by contacting Andi by phone (257-1959) or email (adultlearning@bajcvermont.org).

TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI ALLEN ULLMAN



Torah is filled with hidden teachings that are the source of our ancient and modern mystical traditions. About 2000 years ago, rabbis developed a way of thinking of Torah called PaRDeS, an acronym for these Hebrew words: Pshat, Remez, Drash and Sod. Pshat means the straightforward plot of the text. Remez literally means “hints” and is about studying the text for what it is hinting at or pointing toward. Drash means the ethical or moral teachings of the text, and Sod means the mystical level of teachings to be found in Torah.

This past December, twenty-six people met on a Saturday afternoon to study Torah with Rabbi Alan Ullman. Rabbi Ullman travels around New England teaching Torah as a spiritual path. He was ordained by the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1985 and served as Assistant Rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Worcester until he founded the School for Jewish Studies, dedicated to teaching Torah to adults. The people who attended the Torah study were pleasantly surprised to find themselves participating in intricate interpretations of the portion in Genesis about the Garden of Eden, with provocative questions by Rabbi Ullman leading them to examine words and meanings, to question, and to draw perhaps-unexpected conclusions. Two hours flew by and everyone left wanting more!

We are hoping to be able to deliver “more” in the next few weeks. We are exploring the idea of Rabbi Ullman conducting a Torah study here at BAJC once every six weeks. Donations and a tuition fee charged to participants would make this possible. Interested people will be asked to register and pay a session fee in advance in order to insure funding for the sessions. We need 20 participants at a cost of \$18.00 per session for Temple members and \$25.00 for non-members. Some scholarships will be available. More information about the dates and how to register for the Torah study will be published in the next newsletter and by e-mail, but please contact Yael. if you are

interested in studying with Rabbi Ullman or if you have any questions.

TEEN TRIP TO NYC—YOU MISSED IT!!

Having had such a great time last spring, five teens from the 2007 b'nai mitzvah class headed to New York City for another adventure in December, led by intrepid parents Rick and Clark. They arrived on Friday night (after learning more than they would have liked about city traffic) at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in time to see their gorgeous synagogue just as services let out. Fine NY pizza and a sunny Saturday of walking through Central Park soothed their frazzled nerves, and they enjoyed cultural immersion at the Apple Store, fascinating tours at The Lower East Side Tenement Museum (highly recommended for all ages if you haven't been there), dinner in Chinatown, and a hilarious night on Broadway at "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." They were greeted Sunday morning by snowfall and lots of calls from Vermont about the blizzard of 2007. Being Vermonters, they were not stopped by snow, so they took in the Metropolitan Museum, went back to the Apple Store for free computer time, then took a long walk to experience the joys of *not* Christmas shopping on Fifth Avenue. They joined the crowds at Rockefeller Center (with the requisite NY pretzels and black and white cookies along the way) and walked back uptown on quieter streets for dinner, secure in the knowledge that they wouldn't have to go to school on Monday.

After a last bagel breakfast, they packed back in the car for a speedy drive back to Vermont under beautiful blue skies. Rick and Clark found the five teens a delightful group of people to spend time with while exploring the city together. They hope to keep these trips going in the future, bringing in more teens from our congregation for these bonding activities.

PARENTS OF TEENS: LET'S GET SOMETHING GOING!

The time is long overdue to get a BAJC teen group going! We actually now have some adults who are eager to work with our teens to get some activities scheduled and to make connections with teens from other nearby (and not-so-nearby) congregations and even with the northeast area's NFTY (the National Federation of Temple Youth). Obviously, we want the activities to be things that the teens are interested in doing. We don't want to have meetings just for the sake of meeting, but we do need to get together to talk about the what, where, and when of getting together!

To get started, we definitely need the cooperation of parents. First, we need you to send us the names and e-mail addresses of your teens. Second, we need to know that some parents will be available to drive and/or chaperone "field trips." Third, we need to know what is the best time for an organizational meeting...perhaps a Sunday pizza supper on the 10th or the 17th? Fourth, we need to hear from everyone who is interested, whether they can make the organizational meeting or not. Fifth, if your teens have Jewish friends who are not BAJC members but might be interested in being part of a BAJC teen group, let us know who they are and how to contact them. If you send Faith the contact information for your teens, we will get a list organized and will be able to communicate directly with the kids.

BAJC TEENS CAN BE PHILANTHROPISTS

The B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Program empowers teens to improve the world by launching them on a personal relationship to life-long Jewish giving. The objectives of B'nai Tzedek are:

- To enable every Jewish teen to establish an endowment fund in his or her name in collaboration with their local Jewish Endowment Foundation or Federation.
- To empower Jewish teens to change the world through Jewish philanthropy, tikkun olam (repair of the world) and tzedekah (charitable giving).
- To educate Jewish teens about nonprofit Jewish organizations and teach skills for an allocation process.
- To encourage Jewish teens to increase their giving capacity through the growth of individual funds and a youth foundation model.
- To offer the opportunity to network with other Jewish teens locally and nationally to share their vision.

Teen bnai tzedek groups can begin with grants from the Grinspoon Foundation to help create individual endowment funds which the teens will personally manage. For more information:

http://www.hgf.org/teen_philanthropy/index.php.

NOTHING BUT NETS

As part of its efforts to combat extreme poverty and preventable disease through the world, the Union for Reform Judaism is urging its members to purchase 50,000 insecticide-treated bed nets to fight malaria in Africa through the Nothing But Nets campaign. For just \$10, you can protect an entire family! Log onto www.urj.org/nets and take action today!

UPDATING CONTACTS

Please let Faith know immediately: (1) whenever you have a change of address, telephone number, or e-mail address; (2) whenever you know someone is ill, in the hospital, or just can use a little cheering up-- a visit, a card, or a misheberach; (3) if you are receiving the newsletter on a trial or introductory basis and wish to continue receiving it.

Newsletters, along with e-mail updates and reminders, are available free to members, to students at local residential schools, and to Hebrew school teachers and families. Out-of-towners can subscribe to the newsletter and the e-mail list for \$36. If you are not a member or subscriber or student, this will be your last newsletter, but we hope you will consider becoming a member or, at least, a subscriber. Contact Faith at info@bajcvermont.org for membership information or to subscribe to the newsletter.

THINK SUMMER, THINK ADULT STUDY RETREAT

Before you let the winter doldrums set in, make your plans the Summer Adult Study Retreat (formerly known as Kallah), t this July 8–13 at the beautiful Franklin Pierce College in Rindge, New Hampshire. You will be part of a warm and welcoming community of serious adult learners, Reform Movement scholars and spiritual leaders for a refreshment of mind and spirit. For more information please call Rabbi Joan Glazer Farber at 212-650-4086 or e-mail jfarber@urj.org.

CAN YOU SPARE TEN MINUTES A DAY?

Thousands of Jews around the world are now spending 10 minutes a day reading an e-mail about a Jewish text. Are you part of the **Ten Minutes of Torah chevra** yet? Ten Minutes of Torah, introduced at the 2001 Boston Biennial and delivered directly to your e-mail inbox each weekday, offers a personal connection to a Jewish text, issue or topic, including insight on the week's Torah portion, Israel, social justice, and Jewish ethics. To sign up, visit www.urj.org/torah/ten.

NOW AVAILABLE —

The Torah: A Women's Torah Commentary

Eve doesn't have to take the blame any more! With the publication of *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, the rich voice of women in our tradition will be heard loud and clear. Created in a partnership between the URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, this groundbreaking commentary

presents the women's side of our story. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* costs \$75.00 and may be ordered in bulk by contacting info@urjpress.org or calling URJ Books & Music Customer Service at 212-650-4125. www.urjbooksandmusic.com.



BAJC WOMEN'S WEEKEND AWAY

The Women of BAJC retreat is scheduled for Friday, April 11 through Sunday, 13 at The Lodge in West Dover, VT. The theme of the weekend is Pesach. The cost for the weekend is \$125; financial assistance may be available.

An initial deposit of \$75 is due by Friday, February 15th so that we may determine interest in participation. The balance of \$50.00 is due on March 3rd. Please make checks payable to Women of BAJC and send to: BAJC, PO Box 2353 Brattleboro, VT 05303.

Tentative Schedule of Events:

Friday April 11th, 4:00-5:30 —arrival and afternoon tea; 5:45-6:45—welcome and introduction; Creating Sacred Space-(Please bring a 'sacred'object related to Pesach, Shabbat or something personal); 6:45-8:30--Kabbalat Shabbat followed by Pot Luck Dinner; 8:30-9:30--"Bible Alive;" 9:30—singing / music / relaxation

Saturday April 12th, 8:00-9:00--breakfast/ followed by free time; 10:00-12:00-- Shabbat service and Torah study; 12:30-2:00—lunch; 2:00-3:30--free time; hike outdoors; 3:30-5:30--art/writing program; 5:30-8:00--meal prep and dinner; 8:00--havdalah, followed by a program (TBA)

Sunday, April 13th, 8:00-9:00—breakfast; 9:00-10:00--wrap-up and good-bye

Include the tear-off, below, with your deposit, along with a favorite Passover recipe to be included in a holiday cookbook. Please make checks payable to Women of BAJC and send to: BAJC, PO Box 2353 Brattleboro, VT 05303.

Name _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Amount included: _____ Balance due: _____

Please identify any special interests or talents you have and would like to share.

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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Martin Cohn
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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.)