

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

October 2008

Tishri 5769

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

For his debut president's column, Marty has written about one of my favorite subjects, and one particularly appropriate for the High Holidays – the idea inherent in the *Sh'ma*, arguably our holiest prayer, of listening, and *really* hearing.

I often ask myself what might happen if we were truly able to turn down the noise in our lives and genuinely hear one another and, equally important, hear the whispering voices of our better selves, the voices within encouraging us to embrace our most generous and sympathetic selves. This is the stuff that changes lives and it is the essence of our High Holidays. So let me complement Marty's column with a short family story about listening.

A couple brought their 13 year old daughter to a wise rabbi asking for help in dealing with her behavior. They listed her problems: rebelliousness, poor grades, disobedience, bad attitude and more. "Will you talk to her," they pleaded. The rabbi agreed and spoke with the 13 year old, asking many questions. Gradually she opened up and out poured her bitterness and resentment about never being heard by her parents.

When the parents returned, the rabbi expressed optimism but insisted on one condition. "For the next 30 days, your daughter can say anything she wants to say in any way she wants to say it. You can only listen to her. You can't answer or respond in any way until those 30 days are up." The father swallowed hard. He insisted it was impossible--that he couldn't agree to such a thing in his house, but he protested to no avail. Desperate, the parents finally agreed.

A month later the rabbi was visited by father, mother and daughter. What a totally different set of people they were - - happy, smiling, standing close to one another.

The father explained. "I listened and then listened some more. At first it was all I could do to restrain myself. I'd had it with her and wanted to ground her indefinitely for the things she was saying, but I held my tongue and I listened. Slowly I began to realize that some of the things she was saying were right and that I needed to hear them. After three weeks, my daughter decided she had said everything she had wanted to say. She walked in and sat down on the edge of our bed one evening and said to me 'I'm all finished for now. What do you want to say to me?' My wife and I reached out our arms and she came to us. We hugged her and told her how much we loved her. I told her the ways in which I had been wrong. And I learned what gifts may be possible when we listen with our ears and our hearts."

B'Shalom,
Jim

LET US KNOW

Please call the BAJC office (257-1959) to let us know of illnesses, hospitalizations, deaths, births, engagements, weddings, college graduations, other simchas and sorrows.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

For the past few years, I have worked with Faith putting together this newsletter. Each month I've had the luxury of simply taking the words of Paul and Linda and laying them out on a page. Now I am humbled by having to write a column of my own.

This is my first column as president of BAJC. For the past three years, I have had the honor of being a Board member, ritual committee chair, high holy day chair, fundraising committee member, Torah study and service leader. During these years, I have truly felt blessed to be a member of BAJC because of all the wonderful people that I have met at services and social events. As I assume the presidency, I am very much aware of all the folks that have preceded me in building a wonderful Jewish foundation in Brattleboro on which we can continue to build.

By the time you read this, we will be celebrating Rosh HaShanah together and I am confident that the services will be meaningful to you--as will, I hope, my Rosh HaShanah talk about the story of Haggar and Ishmael and the differences between revelation and discovery.

We are now getting ready to conclude another cycle of Torah by reading the last parashot of Deuteronomy, Parashat Ha'azinu (32:1-52) in which we read the last poem of Moses as he prepares to watch the children of Israel enter the Promised Land.

*Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;
let the earth hear the words I utter!
May my discourse come down as rain,
My speech distill as the dew . . .
(Deuteronomy 32:1-2)*

The religious perspective on hearing is that we must make something meaningful out of what we hear. Are the sounds we perceive mere noise or are they something more? The blast of the *shofar* awakens us to wrong and brings tears of remorse. We can hear the cry of children who are hungry and be moved to help them. To hear something, therefore, is not just a matter of waves in the air, tiny bones, and nerve impulses: It is how we respond to the sound that is truly important. To listen is imperative in our tradition. Although most people think that sight is the dominant sense, in our central prayer we say, *Sh'ma Yisrael*, "Hear, O Israel." Why hear? Perhaps it is because sight is so overpowering that what we see is hard to deny. Hearing, however, is more subtle. To truly hear means taking time to listen and then to reflect. To hear means making an effort, for God's Voice rarely

overpowers (which is why our sages, of blessed memory, called it *Bat Kol*, literally the "Daughter of a Voice").

So, in his final discourse, Moses reminds the people to pay greater heed to the sense of hearing--in essence, to listen more attentively. As we begin a new year, the sound of the *shofar* still fresh in our ears, we too would do well to listen more attentively. What in our everyday lives *do* we hear? Do we listen to the young or ignore them? Do we take time to hear the stories of our elders or only pay attention to the interests of our own generation? Do we hear the pleas of the hungry, not only those across the oceans but also those just a few blocks away? Is it G-d's voice we hear or only the sigh of the wind?

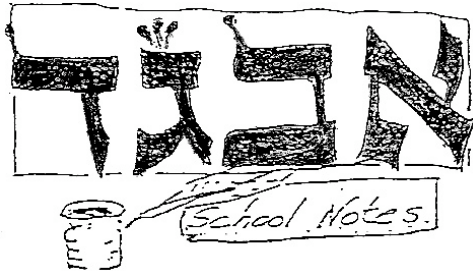
To put congregational listening into action, I am proposing that the BAJC Board conduct a series of meetings in members' homes, getting together to LISTEN to the concerns and thoughts of congregants about the future of BAJC. In the spring of 2009, the Board will participate in a retreat to develop a strategic plan based on what we have HEARD from members. Sign up sheets will be distributed later this month and I strongly encourage you to attend one of these meetings so we all have a chance to listen to each other.

Ha-azinu, "Give ear, take heed, listen!"

B'Shalom,
Marty

BEDTIME BOOKS

Don't you like to snuggle with your child(ren) right before they go to bed and end the day together with a book? If so, sign up for the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's PJ Library (PJ, of course, for pajama) and you will receive, EACH MONTH, a Jewish-content children's book or music CD, or an occasional parenting book. The PJ Library is FREE for the first year for families with children between the ages of six months and five years. The books and music, chosen by early-childhood experts, cover a wide array of themes, such as Jewish holidays, folktales, and Jewish family life. Chosen for your particular child's age, a book or CD will come to you in the mail each month, free! You can register for the PJ Library at www.pjlibrary.org or you can get a brochure at our shul and fill out the application. This is an offer that is simply too good to ignore!



Welcome back to another year of Hebrew School!

Thanks to this year's Jewish leap month, the holidays are falling late, which gives us some time to settle in before we get hit with all the big holidays. But not that much time! Please note that Erev Sukkot falls conveniently on Monday, October 13. We will decorate the sukkah during school, and celebrate with a pot luck dinner immediately afterwards. Everyone is, of course, welcome to join us both for decorating, waving the lulv, and dining. We look forward to seeing you there.

Many aspects of Hebrew School are the same, but we have made a few changes this year. We are delighted that Jim Levinson will be leading the snack-time discussion. Considering how much Jim likes to tell stories, it seemed a shame that in past years most of the students didn't get to know him until they joined the B'nai Mitzvah class. Jim will also be visiting all of the classes individually this year to conduct special programs.

You should get into the habit of checking your e-mail early each week for a short note from your child's teacher with a few details about what the class covered. We hope to keep you informed while also sparking some discussions about Hebrew School outside of Hebrew School.

Amazingly, we've managed to fit (just barely) into our building this year, with several of the teachers and classrooms shuffled around to accommodate this year's students. So if your child is confused about the who's and the where's and the what-level-am-I's, please be reassured that the kids are progressing...it's only the adults who are moving backwards.

Some things of course will never change, and that includes our need for your help. We need parents to sign up for a few weekly housekeeping chores, including washing the cups and cleaning up as needed after snack and sweeping up at the end of the school session. A sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board in the foyer. Last year, we got off to a great start, but help during the second half of the year slumped. If every family were to help out twice during the school year, *Diyenu*. The 2007-8 Golden Broom is awarded jointly to Gary and

Wendy but we're hoping they'll have some stiff competition for the award this year.

L'Shana Tova
Mara

P.S. Any parents who did not get a Parent Handbook about Hebrew School, please pick one up from the office or contact Faith and she'll mail you one. It's important that everyone has one!

A BEAUTIFUL GIFT

Esther and Stanley presented BAJC with a beautiful gift for our shul, and not for the first time! In July they gave us a painting, "Six Days of Creation," by Amram Ebggi, an Israeli artist who studied for a time in New York at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Pratt Graphic Center for Contemporary Printmaking. Although he does not consider himself a religious man, he sees his work as representative of Judaism, frequently incorporating cherished Jewish symbols like the dove symbolizing peace, vineyards, menorahs, Noah's ark, Israeli flora. He has been called a visionary whose imagination combines warmth, sensitivity, and light that will bring smiles of joy to individuals and promote peace among nations. You may have seen some of his work on UNICEF holiday cards, and you can enjoy the glowing "Six Days of Creation" over the fireplace in our own shul.

The other artwork in our sanctuary is also a gift from Esther and Stanley, given to us two years ago in memory of the artist, Rose Wasserman, who died in 2006 at the age of 85. Ms Wasserman, a friend of the Esther and Stanley, had a long and illustrious design career in New York City before becoming chairperson of the Creative Design program at Pratt Institute School of Art and, still later in life, a teacher of watercolor painting in the Los Angeles Jewish Home for the Aging, Esther and Stanley's gift is an original silkscreen called "Shalom," representative of the prayer for peace that is always in our hearts.

Esther and Stanley are longtime members of our congregation, although they no longer have a home in our area. They are active members of their shul in Westport, CT, but they continue to be an important part of our congregation with their membership, their gifts and donations, albums of photos of BAJC events they are able to attend, and their good wishes. We are blessed to have two such staunch supporters!

GOOD DEEDS

Last winter BAJC's caring cooks prepared and served one Shabbat meal a month for the folks living at the Morningside Shelter. The meals were greatly appreciated and the comraderie of breaking bread together was enjoyed by both the residents and the BAJC volunteers. Judy and our Social Action committee are again asking for volunteers to cook, serve and share a bountiful dinner with the folks living at Morningside homeless shelter, the third Friday of each month throughout the year. The committee has some funds to help pay for food to cook for volunteers who can do the cooking but cannot afford to buy the food on their own. On the other hand, people who cannot cook or serve a meal might want instead to make a donation to BAJC for the Social Action committee to use for food purchases. Please get in touch with Judy for more information, to volunteer, or to coordinate dates. If you want to make a donation to this cause, you can send a check to BAJC, noting that it is for Morningside meals.

While on the topic of food, please remember to bring donations of food to the high holiday services at West Village meeting house to represent the food you are NOT eating when you fast on Yom Kippur. These bags of food will be brought to the Drop-In Center, where they are sorely needed. Here too, if you prefer to donate a check for food instead of the food itself, you can send a check to BAJC, noting that it is for the Drop-In Center.

The next human need after food is clothing. Janet is asking for donations of clean warm winter clothing needed by international students and families. Items needed are warm jackets, hats, gloves, boots, coats—both adult and children's sizes. Contact Janet for more formation or to arrange to drop off clothing, or you can bring clothing to the shul office on Monday or Wednesday afternoons.

MEMBERSHIP

Included in this newsletter is a membership commitment form for the new year, 5769.

Twenty people have already filled this out and have sent in all or part of their dues commitment. We hope that the rest of you will do the same as soon as possible. Even if you cannot send a check at this moment, please send the form in and indicate the level of your membership. If you need to make special arrangements concerning your dues, talk to Faith. If you would like to have an amount automatically debited from your checking account,

Faith can send you a form and a check for the amount you determine will be deposited to BAJC from your checking account each month.

BAJC's "bare bones" operating budget depends upon the financial support of members and friends. Without that support we cannot heat the building, plow the snow and mow the grass, provide a spiritual leader and Hebrew school teachers, make needed repairs and improvements, rent space for high holidays, pay for supplies and postage, or do tikkun olam. We know these are difficult economic times, but we ask you to support BAJC to the greatest extent you can so that we can continue to provide a home, services and activities for our congregation. Just as your needs are the priority in the BAJC budget, please make BAJC a priority in your budget!

ADULT EDUCATION NEEDS YOUR INPUT

As we begin another Jewish year, we again want to again provide opportunities for our Jewish growth through studying and learning together. Our goal is to satisfy our longing for Jewish learning and to provide avenues of access to our synagogue for the diverse Brattleboro Jewish community (those whose Jewish identity rests in their politics, their children's education, their need for peace and sanctuary, their prayer life, their life cycle moments, their connection to Israel, their past, etc.). We hope that adult education offerings will bring us closer together, and closer to Judaism, so it is important for us to know what classes and what kinds of learning will accomplish that.

Please forward answers to these questions to the Adult Education Coordinator, Andi.

- What course offered during the year would be so exciting to you that you couldn't resist taking it?
- About what topic would you like to teach or lead discussions during the year?

E-mail answers to Andi or call to talk to her about adult ed possibilities. Or, leave a message on the BAJC voicemail for adult education.



FALL FESTIVALS

Sukkot this year begins the evening of Monday October 13 and culminates with Shemini Atzeret on Tuesday October 21. At BAJC we'll celebrate Sukkot on **Monday October 13**, during Hebrew School and then immediately thereafter with a brief service at 5:45 PM. We get to wave the lulav and the etrog and sing festive songs in the sukkah, weather permitting, followed by a potluck supper in the sukkah or in the shul. Come early to help decorate the sukkah, then stay late after Hebrew School for a family service and good food. (Note: This Sukkot service and potluck supper takes the place of our "regular" October Kabbalat Shabbat and potluck.)

One of the themes of our Sukkot celebration each year, beyond harvest and thanksgiving, is vulnerability, symbolized by the sukkah itself – a vulnerability which isn't always a bad thing. We speak about vulnerability both as being open with one another and as a means of standing in solidarity with people all over the world who are ever vulnerable to poverty, disease and an absence of shelter.

Our Simchat Torah celebration this year falls on **Tuesday October 21**. We'll begin with a Yizkor service at 6 p.m., the second of the four Yizkor services of the year. Simchat Torah festivities will begin after Yizkor at 6:30. Simchat Torah celebrates the end of our Torah cycle, so we'll chant the very last verses of the Torah, then roll the Torah all the way back to the beginning to chant the first verses. While rolling, we stop to take in the sights: the Song of the Sea, the Ten Commandments, the three-fold blessing, the beginning and end of each of the Books. And, of course, there will be lots of dancing with the Torah. Each year someone has stepped forward to "dress up" our prayers musically in the special holiday garb of novel and unusual melodies. Who's going to take up the challenge this year? If you're game, please be in touch with Jim, and also contact Jim if you'd like to chant the Hakafot and if you'd like to participate in the Torah reading.

BAJC MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide a context and structure for people to be Jewish together in a rural environment. This 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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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 5768. 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.)