

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

November 2008

Cheshvan 5769

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

I continue to feel such a warm glow a week after our High Holidays together. What a privilege to be part of a shul where community can coalesce like we did. That comes from the efforts of a great many, not a few.

Afterwards a person came up to me and said, "I think I did the work. I do feel cleansed. I even feel that atonement may have been granted. But how do I maintain this?"

I heard myself saying two things by way of response to this thoughtful and deeply committed person. First, a suggestion that she try – try her best to follow the commandment of *Sh'mirat ha-Lashon*, avoiding *l'shon hara*, the evil tongue.

Interestingly, a few days later, our B'nai Mitzvah class took on that *mitzvah* to explore for a week – a tough challenge but one with huge rewards. One of our contemporary sages has said that it would be difficult to imagine the beneficial effect on the world if each Individual A simply refused to say anything negative about Individual B to Individual C, before saying it directly to Individual B.

The Torah spells it out for us in Exodus (23) and Leviticus (19), saying *no* to tale bearing, to the initiation of false rumors, to insults, to grudges, to vengeance. But I often find myself going back to a prayer offered by the 19th century Polish rabbi Israel Kagan. Not a bad one with which to begin a day which is likely to be difficult:

Gracious and merciful God, help me to restrain myself from speaking or listening to derogatory, damaging or hostile speech. I will try not to engage in l'shon hara, either about individuals or about an

entire group of people. I will strive not to say anything that contains falsehood, insincere flattery, scoffing, or elements of needless dispute, anger, arrogance, oppression, or embarrassment to others. Grant me the strength to say nothing unnecessary, so that all my actions and speech cultivate a love for Your creatures and for You.

The second response I heard myself offer was simply, "Practice kindness – *chesed*."

I think often of the author Aldous Huxley who, on his deathbed, was asked if he had any regrets about his life. What would he have done differently if he had life to live over? Without pausing for an instant, Huxley replied, "I wish I could have been kinder." "I wish I could have been kinder."

Just these two take us a long way toward *tikkun olam*, don't they?

B'Shalom,
Jim

LET US KNOW

Please call the BAJC office (257-1959) or Faith (464-2632) to let us know of illnesses, hospitalizations, deaths, births, engagements, weddings, college graduations, other simchas and sorrows.



FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

This year we will be celebrating the 145th Thanksgiving holiday since 1863, when Abraham Lincoln proclaimed, *"I do therefore invite my fellow citizens... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving.... And I recommend to them that ... they do also ... commend to [God's] tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged."*

Most American Jews easily relate to Thanksgiving because it's the American holiday most associated with family gatherings and food...and it is based on Sukkot! But, there is much more to the holiday than turkey, sweet potatoes, green beans and pumpkin pie.

Thanksgiving is a celebration of gratitude and an acknowledgement of good fortune. Our Jewish tradition is reflected in Lincoln's words commanding us to care for those who cannot care for themselves: our society's widows, orphans, mourners and sufferers. Among the sufferers, Judaism includes the poor and the hungry. Scattered throughout our texts are guidelines for offering support to the less fortunate. We are instructed to leave the corners of our fields for the poor, to maintain the poor and to give according to our means. One cannot think about Judaism without thinking about charity and tzedakah--both monetary generosity and the pursuit of *tzedek*—justice.

Thanksgiving is a holiday about appreciating what we have. By recognizing our blessings, we become aware of our vulnerability. We realize that the abundance we enjoy is tempered by the poverty that surrounds us. We live in one of the richest countries in the world, yet our communities are filled with the impoverished and hungry. Lincoln called upon all Americans to observe a day of Thanksgiving each year to thank God for what they had and to pray for those people who were suffering, but Judaism calls upon us to do more than just pray, and on more than one day. We are commanded to alleviate suffering. Deuteronomy, Chapter 15, says, "Do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for what he needs."

At Congregation Shir Heharim, we have much for which to be thankful. Our building, our programs, our religious school and our caring community are just some of things that come to mind. We are

thankful for everyone who has helped create BAJC as a house of prayer, a house of learning, and a house where tzedakah and gemilut chasadim are part of our fabric. We are thankful for having a Jewish home, but we need YOUR help to maintain this place as a home for us now and for generations to come. If you want to keep this place heated and cooled, staffed and clean, if you want our excellent programming to continue, and you and your children to continue on the path to becoming learned Jews, if you want us to continue to be able to help others in our community who are not fortunate enough to have a home, then please give what you can and share what you can. If you are not already a member — become one; without the support of members there would be no Jewish community to turn to when you need it. We also need you to volunteer your time, your expertise, your energy, your presence. Lend us a hand. Give us a few minutes a week, an hour a month, whatever you can. The "Odds 'n' Ends" article in this newsletter will give you some ideas about how you can help. To volunteer, contact me or any Board member any time!

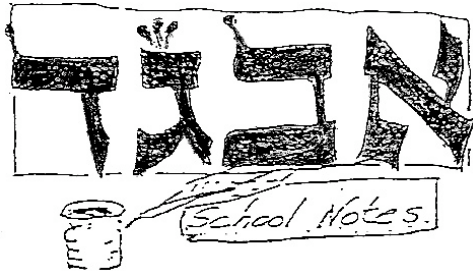
So, as we gather around our bountiful tables this year, give thanks for all we have and for all we can do. And, pass those mashed potatoes!

B'Shalom,
Marty

AN INVITATION FROM THE BEN'S FAMILY

Please join us for the bar mitzvah of our son Ben on December 6th at ten in the morning at Congregation Ahavas Achim at 84 Hastings Street in Keene, NH . Because West Village Meeting House was not available on this date, Rabbi Sarah and the Keene congregation kindly invited us to use their beautiful synagogue for Ben's bar mitzvah, giving us yet another opportunity for our two congregations to meet, pray and celebrate together. Becoming a bar mitzvah marks Ben's new role as an adult member of our Jewish community, so we really hope you will make the trip to Keene to welcome Ben into our BAJC congregation. We will gladly arrange for a van to transport people to and from the BAJC shul and/or organize carpools. Please let us know if you will need either a ride or directions to the Keene synagogue.

Laura and Michael



The first Hebrew School participation in Shabbat and potluck supper will be hosted by Judith's "Beyond Aleph" class and Jackie's Kita Gimmel on Friday, November 7th. The service will begin at 6:00, and dinner will be at 7:00. A little noisier than a usual Friday night, but oh, so much fun, and of course, everyone is welcome. Bring your favorite vegetarian or dairy main dish or salad, and some dessert. We will supply the challah.

Speaking of challah, if you've never baked one before, it's a great parent-kid project to try. You can even make the dough on Thursday night, let it rise in the fridge overnight, punch it down on Friday morning and it will be ready for braiding and baking on Friday afternoon. Here's a recipe you can try.

Mara's Vermont Challah (very popular at Hebrew School)

Combine in mixer with dough hook, or mix by hand: 1¼ cups lukewarm water, ½ cup vegetable oil, ¼ - ½ cup maple syrup, 5 large eggs

Add while mixing: 5 cups bread flour, 2 teaspoons instant yeast*, 1 Tablespoon kosher salt, 1 teaspoon cinnamon (optional), 2 cups all purpose flour or whole wheat pastry flour

Turn out dough and knead adding up to 1 ½ cups more all purpose or whole wheat flour. Place dough in a large bowl, cover with plastic wrap or a pot lid and leave in a warm place (warm not hot, or it will come to life and escape from the bowl). When dough has doubled in size, about 90 minutes, punch it down and let it rise another 30 minutes.

Turn the dough out onto a floured counter. Cut into six equal lumps. Roll each lump into a snake about 14 inches long. If the dough resists, let it sit for a few minutes and try again. Make two braids, pinching the ends together firmly so they don't unbraid themselves in the oven. Transfer to lined or greased cookie sheet and allow to rise another hour.

Preheat the oven to 400°. Beat an egg with a little water and gently paint the challahs. 15 minutes later paint them again and sprinkle with seeds (sesame, poppy, flax--my favorite).

Bake on the middle rack for 10 minutes. Turn down oven to 375° and bake another 30 minutes.

Turn off oven, but leave Challahs in for another 10 minutes. Take them out and cool them on a rack.

*If you don't have instant yeast, proof the yeast in ¼ cup of the water and add it to the wet ingredients.

Although we didn't have challah at our Sukkot celebration last month, we did have a fun holiday time, with lots of sukkah-decorating, lulav-shaking, etrog-sniffing, singing, and sharing of good food at the potluck at the end of Hebrew school. Special thanks to Felipe for building and putting up the framework for our sukkah, to Jackie for harvesting her garden so that we had plenty of vines, flowers, and apples for decorations, to Rashed's Nursery for giving us many pots of beautiful mums to border the sukkah, and to David's son Adam who gave us "lulav lessons" that insured that this tradition will safely and authentically travel into the future with our students. There was something wonderful in witnessing the intent and intensity of the "shakers" as they emulated the technique taught by Adam, clearly a master lulav shaker. In our siddur, there is the line in some of the prayers: "*ofrosaleynu succat shlomecha*" -- "spread over us the sukkah of your peace". Our sukkah may just help you experience this feeling when you come and share a meal with your family or friends under its glorious shelter. If you missed the opportunity this year, plan to spend some time in our sukkah next year, the first week in October. We'll remind you!

B'shalom,
Mara

MUST SEE T.V.

Watch a 90-minute PBS Masterpiece Contemporary presentation on November 9th at 9:00 p.m., about a group of Auschwitz prisoners destined for the gas chamber who convene a court and jury to charge God with murder, collaboration with the enemy, and breach of contract with His chosen people. A judge, a prosecutor and a defense attorney call witnesses and examine God's relationship to the Jews from the Babylonian exile to the Holocaust, citing Torah, theology, history, and science. This will surely be an intellectual and emotional presentation with a wrenching ending. Check local PBS stations for listing: www.pbs.org/masterpiece.

FALL OFFERINGS FOR ADULT LEARNING AT BAJC

The courses listed below will be presented if there is adequate registration. Please register by calling the BAJC office (257-1959) and leaving a message in the adult education mailbox, or register on line at www.bajcvermont.org. Courses are free for BAJC members and \$10-\$30 for others; some scholarships are available; please ask when you register. Monthly gatherings are free for all and no registration is necessary. All classes will be held at our shul at 151 Greenleaf Street.

The Children of Abraham; Islam; The Koran and Its Links to Judaism

Saturday afternoon, November 1st, 2-4:00 p.m. In modern times, the anguished tribulations Jews & Muslims have suffered have made them forget their shared origins. Throughout most of their interaction, Jews and Muslims have recognized and accepted the common origins of their faiths, the ancestry of Abraham, the belief in One God, the high morality defined by the Jewish prophets (all of whom are also considered Muslim prophets), and the evolution of Judaic law over the millennia as incorporated into the Muslim religious code. We will discuss these shared beliefs, laws, culture, morality, and practices and we will trace areas of divergence. Taught by Javed Chaudhri, born in Pakistan, who attended the Lawrence College at Ghora Gali in the Himalayas and Marlboro College, studying Social Research, Anthropology and Management. Javed has worked as a business executive and teacher and is a lay member of the Interfaith Clergies in Brattleboro and Greenfield.

Multi-level Independent Hebrew Study

Wednesday evenings, 7:00 to 8:30, beginning November 5th. For first-time Hebrew learners, students who want to better understand prayer and biblical Hebrew, and students interested in conversational Hebrew. Students will learn in independent activities aimed at mastery of these various interests. We will organize materials and coaches for each type of learner. Learn at your own pace, receive coaching, and benefit from the support of co-learners. Coordinated by Dalit Sivan, an Israeli who has studied Education at SIT, and Andi Waisman, educator and Hebrew learner.

Mayyim Hayyim, Living Waters, and a Community Mikveh Field Trip

Sunday, December 14, 2008 at 2:15 to 3:45 p.m. a 90-minute program of basic information about what mikveh is, what types of life transitions are typically marked by mikveh, and the roots of water rituals in

Judaism and other religions. We will learn how to prepare, how to immerse, and what prayers to say. We will have the opportunity to visit the Mayyim Hayyim Education Center, making a Jewish day of it by visiting Judaica shops/bookstores, kosher restaurants, and other Brookline favorites.

Torah Study

Usually held the second and fourth Saturday morning of each month from ten to noon. Discussion led by Marty Cohn (in English) of the week's parashah allows for wonderful insights. Study guides can be found on our website. A brief morning shacharit service precedes study. Dates are noted on the newsletter calendar.

Israeli Film Club

Fourth Sundays, every other month, 4-6 pm showing of an Israeli film at our shul. Popcorn and soft drinks are available and there is ample time for discussion. Begins in December. Organized by Marty Cohn, BAJC President and Torah scholar.

Singing is Like Praying Twice

Held on the first Shabbat morning of the month at 8:30, prior to the Shabbat service (beginning November 1st). Learn about the joyous path to Jewish experience through song, learning and practicing music that will enhance the Shabbat service. Led by Allen Ross and Andi Waisman

SJBC

For its November 20th discussion, the Significant Jewish Books Club has chosen *On Borrowed Words* by Ilan Stavans, who was one of the participants in the Literary Festival weekend in Brattleboro. You can join SJBC for this particular discussion or for all our meetings, held at the shul approximately every other month on a Thursday evening, along with a potluck supper. Call Esther for more information.



FYI: POLICIES ADOPTED BY THE BOARD

Regarding services, particularly b'nai mitzvah:

Because BAJC places a high value on the congregational celebration of Shabbat, it is strongly recommended that all Shabbat services be held in our own synagogue at 151 Greenleaf Street. Plans for services or other observances or events of a religious nature must be presented to the Ritual Committee and approved by the Board if they are to be held at a venue other than our synagogue. When our building cannot accommodate the number of people expected at a service, and to keep services accessible to our congregants, off-site BAJC events will be held at the West Village Meeting House or a suitable Brattleboro facility. (A "suitable Brattleboro facility" would be one convenient to the congregation, within a reasonable distance from central Brattleboro.) If WVMH or a suitable Brattleboro facility is not available on a particular date, the event will be scheduled for a date when one IS available. This policy will be effective beginning in 5770 (September 2009). Prior to that year, the Ritual committee will consider requests for off-site BAJC events and will make recommendations to the Board for its final decision. The sponsors of an off-site event approved by the Board will make provisions for transportation for BAJC members who have expressed interest in attending through contact with BAJC or the sponsors.

Although the ark shall not be moved out of the building, a Torah may be moved if necessary, with a member of the Ritual Committee or its designee responsible for moving the Torah in a safe and ritually-respectful manner. An off-site place where our Torah is used should not have visible symbols of other religions to the extent that is possible.

Regarding food in our shul:

Food served in our shul should be vegetarian, dairy, and/or gilled fish as a regular procedure. At a special event, announced in advance, meat may be served IF it is "kosher style" (i.e., beef, chicken, or veal), and no dairy is used or served. Shellfish and pork are never allowed.

Regarding the use of our building:

The BAJC synagogue shall be used on Shabbat or holidays only for activities of a spiritual nature, such as prayer or study. Other activities, including but not limited to committee meetings, shall not be scheduled or held in the synagogue building on the Sabbath (i.e., Friday evening through Saturday sundown), on Jewish holidays or at special

services, subject to review by the Ritual Committee and Board. Attendees at any service may not be approached individually during or immediately after that service to donate time, effort, or money to BAJC

Plans to use the building for any purposes other than religious services must be cleared with the Administrator or the President. There will be no charge for BAJC members using the building or the services of the spiritual leader for life cycle events, but fees will be charged to non-members for the services of our spiritual leader. Members using the building or grounds for private celebrations or events not open to the entire congregation will pay a fee; non-members will pay a higher fee. Non-members using the building for a religious event must first have permission from the Ritual committee.

Regarding membership and dues abatement:

Membership in BAJC represents our commitment to each other in community, commitment to Jewish continuity in the world, opportunities for spiritual exploration, and much more. Although BAJC will never turn anyone away for lack of funds, it is membership dues that sustain us. Dues abatement is available when needed. Individuals or families requesting consideration will receive a worksheet and will meet with the Temple Administrator, Temple President or designee to determine dues and to help individuals and families set up a payment plan. Membership dues and the abatement schedule are also available on our website.

ODDS 'N' ENDS

Remember to bring rinsed deposit bottles and cans and used printer cartridges to the collection bins in the little shed to the right of the barn at 151 Greenleaf. Also, please, please, please use Goodsearch.com as your default search engine. "Where it asks " Who do you Goodsearch for?" (okay, we know it should read "For whom do you Goodsearch?"), type in Brattleboro Area Jewish Community and we will get a penny every time you click. Those pennies can add up to a very nice amount each year if everyone in the community participate--kids definitely included! It requires no effort and you will find the information you want as readily as you would on Google!

So that we can maintain contact with our BAJC teens, and maybe get some activities going for them, please send us teen names and e-mail addresses (if they are different from parents' addresses), beginning with last year's b'nai mitzvah and going back four or five years from there.

Help is needed to put our BAJC gardens to rest for the winter. Stop by whenever you can to pull weeds, deadhead flowers, and do whatever needs to be done to prepare for the change of seasons.

There are still lots of spaces on the Hebrew school sign-up sheet for parents. Please pick a date when you can either help set up and clear the snack or sweep up at the end of school, then sign your name on the sheet on the bulletin board in the entrance foyer.

The beautiful new bookcases Mark Schiller built and donated are still awaiting finishing (polyurethane? wax?) so that he can secure them to the walls in the office and we can start using them. We already have a volunteer to catalogue and shelve books, but we can't begin until the bookcases are finished. We have many interesting

and worthwhile books that should be circulating, not stored in boxes in the loft!

Don't forget to 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 a totally free offer that is simply too good to ignore if you have children between six months and five years old!

Hospitality is an important part of a welcoming community, which BAJC strives to be. We need a "hospitality team" to see that there is always someone to open the building for services and other activities, turn on heat and lights, greet members, introduce new attendees and make them feel welcome, provide snacks for onegs, and make sure everything is cleaned up at the end, heat and lights are adjusted appropriately and everything is locked up. One person cannot do it all the time, but there should always be at least one person responsible each time—a person willing to be "first in, last out" at a service or special event. You can help create a warm and welcoming home in our shul if you sign up with Faith to be on the hospitality team. In addition, we need two or three people to be responsible for hosting our Kabbalat Shabbat potlucks on Dec.26, Jan.9, Feb.13, Mar.13, June 6. Faith will gladly send you potluck instructions.

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

Spiritual leader: James Levinson

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is in session, or by appointment



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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 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.)