

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

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January 2009

Tevet 5769

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## FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

The story of Jacob and Rachel, our recent Torah portion, came to mind last week during the ice storm that hit us hard in areas surrounding Brattleboro.

When Jacob was told he'd have to work seven years for Rachel, he had the choice we all have when confronted with important news affecting our lives. He *could* have converted this news into suffering, dwelling on the excruciatingly long time it would take him to attain the object of his desire--*or*-- he could think of this work not as arduous labor, but rather, literally, as a labor of love, recognizing that sometimes the joys of anticipation exceed the joys of the achievement itself. We are told, in fact, that Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that the seven years were as a few days. Jacob had a choice. David Ben Gurion had the same choice when, as a young idealist arriving in Palestine from Russia, he confronted great difficulty. Helen Keller had the same choice. Nelson Mandela had the same choice. We all have that same choice, to take control over what will be a source of suffering and what will not, and to have an understanding that what to others may mean only pain and suffering *could* for us be a source of strength, of sustenance, and even of joy.

And so it was with last week's ice storm. No power, no phones, trees and branches covering the driveway. And knee surgery upcoming. Source of suffering? Surely could have been, but Louise and I found it possible to have a very different take on it. Although the ice surely was not a good thing for the trees, it was absolutely gorgeous to behold, particularly as the sun shining on the ice cast

prisms of rainbow colors. I've worked in or traveled through 46 countries over the years, but I'm not sure I've ever seen anything quite as beautiful as the view outside our windows. We might have paid big bucks for a vacation to see such a sight, staying in a cramped hotel room and returning home with jet lag. By contrast, even without power and phone we remained cozy in front of the woodstove, able to enjoy the beauty brought by the storm. While recovering from the surgery, I've been able to do more resting and reading than any time in my memory. (I highly recommend one of my discoveries, Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife*, a touching story about two of the "Righteous among the Nations" in Warsaw during the Holocaust.)

Our sages remind us regularly that events are what we make of them. Perhaps even our present financial and environmental woes, viewed positively, might be seen as rare opportunities to bring us together in unexpected ways, to appreciate our interconnectedness, and to strengthen us as community.

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.

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

The start of a new secular year is upon us, along with the start of a new book of the Torah – Exodus. In this book, we will read about Moses and the journey of the Children of Israel from slavery to receiving the Ten Commandments.

Right in the middle of the first parashat (Parashat Shemot, Exodus 1:1-6:1), which we will read at our Shabbat service on January 17<sup>th</sup>, we will hear the story of the burning bush that was not consumed. Moses, the protagonist of our story, is ordained from birth to be the savior of the enslaved Jewish people, but Moses doesn't know this until he encounters a bizarre, indeed miraculous, phenomenon in the wilderness. As Moses wanders through the desert herding his sheep, God plants a thorn bush in Moses' path. The text describes the incident in this way: "[Moses] gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, 'I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?'" (Exodus 3:2-3). By startling Moses in this way, God succeeds in stopping him in his tracks in order to engage him in a dialogue about the future role he will play as the leader of the Jews.

While Moses readily takes note of the wondrous sight before him, I wonder if a 21<sup>st</sup> century Jew in that same situation would miss the marvelous bush altogether. How would we contemporary Jews interpret the dramatic image of the bush that burns but is not consumed? Rabbi Carole B. Balin, assistant professor of history at New York's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion says "On the one hand, we might dismiss it as an unrealistic and thus unreasonable element that functions merely as a literary device in this story. On the other hand, it might serve as a reminder to us that miracles can and do, in fact, occur in our daily lives if we, like Moses, 'turn aside to look' at these marvelous sights."

At BAJC, I have noticed many wondrous sights this past month. I have seen our members volunteer to help at the Overflow Shelter. I have seen our members set up for services without being asked. I have seen members work to prepare space for a BAJC library in the cottage behind the shul. I have seen parents prepare snacks and help clean up after our religious school day. I have seen visits to folks who are in the hospital or a care facility. I have seen our members help each other out with food, showers, or a warm place to stay during the power outages of the recent epic ice storm. We hope to continue to see "marvelous sights" like these in the future, beginning this month with a series of

informal meetings in members' homes to share our vision for what our congregation can be over the next few years. I urge you to attend at least one of these meetings so that you too can see "the bush that burns but is not consumed" at BAJC. After all, seeing is believing if we choose to notice and acknowledge what we see.

B'Shalom,  
Marty

### ..... : **COME. MEET. PARTICIPATE.** : :

: During my Rosh Hashanah address, I announced :  
: that the BAJC Board of Trustees would conduct a :  
: series of "coffee klatches" in member's homes :  
: throughout the Brattleboro Area Jewish :  
: Community. :  
:

: My hope is that every single member of our :  
: congregation will be able to attend at least one of :  
: these meetings so that we can hear your vision :  
: for Shir HeHarim. :  
:

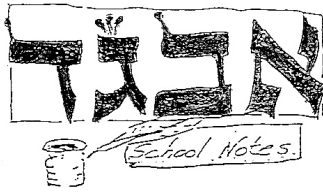
: After we have conducted these meetings, the :  
: board will participate in a retreat with a Union of :  
: Reform Judaism facilitator in which we can take :  
: all that we have discovered and shape a common :  
: vision for our temple. :  
:

: Seven members have generously donated the :  
: use of their homes. The meetings will take place :  
: on Sunday afternoons from 4-6pm. :  
:

: Please choose from the following list and let me :  
: know which meeting you will be attending. :  
:

- ❖ January 11, 2009 — Dunn (Brattleboro)
- ❖ January 25, 2009 —Myers (Brattleboro)
- ❖ February 1, 2009 —Metsch / Knapp (Guilford)
- ❖ February 8, 2009 —Mazur (Marlboro)
- ❖ February 15, 2009 —Shakun (Williamsville)
- ❖ March 1, 2009 —Strothman (Putney)
- ❖ March 8, 2009 —Schuster (West Dover)

: Marty Cohn :  
: Email: martin@cohnpr.com :  
:.....



The New Year is traditionally a time to think about the future, and despite being Vermont Jews, we can hold with tradition from time to time. As I wrote last month, the Hebrew School teachers have been giving much thought to the future of our school. The range of interesting and important topics that we would like to address will simply not fit into the two hours allotted to us each week.

As the requirements for our B'nai Mitzvah class have increased, we have tried to ease some of the burden on these students by "preloading" the younger children with Shabbat morning blessings. While I am very pleased to report that many of our current 11-year-olds will enter next year's B'nai Mitzvah class with a strong mastery of some of the material, I am concerned that in trying to meet this short-term goal we are losing site of our most important objective. The Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony is *not* the golden ring. Our desire, indeed our only reason to exist, is to welcome our kids into a Jewish community that they will want to continue to belong to, and learn in, for the rest of their lives.

Therefore, we have some serious discussions and difficult choices ahead of us. I would very much like to hear your thoughts on what Hebrew School means to you. We sometimes ask the students, "Why do you come to Hebrew School?" but we seldom ask the obvious follow-up, "Why do your parents make you?" Now, I'm asking.

I would also ask that you help us bring Judaism out of Hebrew School on Monday afternoons and into daily life. To do this, you don't have to toe a party line or be a fount of great rabbinic knowledge (who is?). Did you know that most of our students, when asked, report that Adonoi is a white-bearded guy on a golden throne in the sky? There's the beginning of a dinner conversation.

The next Family Shabbat is Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:00. There will be a one hour service led by the students, followed by a pot-luck supper. Let's all meet to celebrate Shabbat as a family and as a community event.

I look forward to seeing you there.

B'Shalom,  
Mara

## SIX ADULT ED OFFERINGS THIS MONTH

**Introduction to Jewish Meditation**—Sunday, January 25, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. Explore meditation as "prayer slowed down" - a way to harness more of the power and meaning within our tradition and its prayers, blessings, and rituals. Through practice and experimentation we will also explore a variety of our ancient tradition's techniques aimed at quieting our busy minds and remembering what really matters. Come prepared to sit, laugh, sing and share. Taught by Dave Cohen, who completed a 3 year intensive program on Jewish Meditation at Chochmat HaLev in Berkeley, CA and has led Jewish meditation groups for adults and teens in the San Francisco. Please register in advance: call 257-1959 and leave a message on the adult ed voicemail.

**Introduction to Jewish Mysticism**-- Shabbat afternoon, January 31st. 2:30. A one-session introduction where participants will wrestle with their own and their forebears' answers to such questions as, "Why were we created? Why do we feel joy? Why do we suffer? Why do we die?" Taught by Michael Knapp. Please register in advance: call 257-1959 and leave a message on the adult ed voicemail.

**Hymns, Psalms, Prayers from the Chassidic tradition**--third Shabbat of the month, beginning January 17<sup>th</sup>, 12:30 p.m. An introduction to the rich tradition of Jewish melody from the Chassidic tradition. We will sing together and share zmirot, prayers, and Shabbat songs. Led by Rabbi Rebecca Bat Ohni.

**Yoga and the Jewish Spirit** – January 25<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-8:00 p.m., led by Kim Friedman. Bring a yoga mat, a foam block, and a cotton blanket.

**Torah study** – January 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 10:00-noon, led by Marty Cohn.

**Singing is Like Praying Twice**—January 3<sup>rd</sup> at 8:30 a.m., prior to the Shabbat morning service. Led by Allen Ross and Andi Waisman



### A SUMMER OF ACTION: MITZVAH CORPS FOR TEENS

Mitzvah Corps allows Reform Jewish teens to experience social action at its best. Tikkun olam, friends, expanded horizons, and fun, are all part of the Mitzvah Corps experience. With eight programs to choose from, there's one that's right for every teen. For more information visit: [www.mitzvahcorps.org](http://www.mitzvahcorps.org) or 212.650.4071

## HOW TO STAY SAFE

Fear 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!

## SPEND A SEMESTER AT KIBBUTZ LOTAN; EARN 16 COLLEGE CREDITS

Kibbutz Lotan, a Reform Kibbutz in the Negev, holds a 15-week **Peace, Justice and the Environment Semester Abroad** program in partnership with Living Routes and Bustan L'Shalom. The program explores the connections between new forms of ecological identity and stewardship, social justice and community in Israel. Students will work alongside Palestinian-Arab, Bedouin and Jewish Israelis who are striving for a just and lasting peace. There will be hands-on experience in ecological design, green building and sustainable agriculture and the opportunity to put permaculture into action in a Bedouin Village in the Negev Desert. Students completing the course will receive 16 U.S. undergraduate credits from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, widely

transferable to colleges and universities throughout the U.S. and worldwide. For more information, see the Kibbutz website, [www.kibbutzlotan.com](http://www.kibbutzlotan.com).

## RJ.ORG: NEWS AND VIEWS OF REFORM JEWS

If you've never ventured into the world of blogging, now's the chance to get your feet wet. Check out the new Reform Movement blog at [www.RJ.org](http://www.RJ.org), which is a place to read facts, opposing opinions, calls to action and interesting tidbits from the greater Jewish world. New information is posted daily on the site, which is a platform for Reform Jews to come together to chat, opine, *kibbitz* and learn in an online community. Log on and chime in today – [www.RJ.org](http://www.RJ.org).



## FREE 10-DAY ISRAEL EXPERIENCE

Attention parents and grandparents: Give the gift of a lifetime. Sign up your 18-26 year old for a free, fun and adventure filled Israel experience. The Union for Reform Judaism, an official Taglit-Birthright Israel program sponsor, offers a free 10-day trip to Israel for all Jewish 18-26 year olds.

The Taglit-Birthright Israel: Keshet Trip provides young adults with the opportunity to explore the cobblestone alleyways of ancient Jerusalem, camp in a Bedouin tent, experience modern Israel's vibrant nightlife, travel with new friends and connect with Israel.

To date, more than 200,000 young adults have taken advantage of Taglit-Birthright Israel. Birthright inspires participants to explore their Jewish identity, to deepen engagement in Jewish life and to feel a personal connection to the land and people of Israel.

Don't miss out on providing your 18-26 year old the opportunity of a lifetime.

To apply for the **Free** Keshet 10-Day Birthright experience visit [www.keshetbirthright.org](http://www.keshetbirthright.org). Preference can only be given if you sign up for the Keshet trip.

\*Registration for Spring/Summer 2009 programs opens February\*.

Join our pre-trip e-mail list to stay updated. Sign up at [www.keshetbirthright.org](http://www.keshetbirthright.org).

## SHABBAT – THE ONLY HOLIDAY(S) THIS MONTH

Our first Shabbat service of the month is on January 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10:00 a.m., led by Jim Levinson. Next comes a Kabbalat Shabbat service at 6:00 p.m. on the 9<sup>th</sup>. This is a family service welcoming Shabbat, led by Jim and our Hebrew school students. Parents, please be sure to bring your children; everyone else, be ready to kvell at the participation of our Hebrew school students and to shmooze and sup at the potluck following the service. Come to the second Shabbat morning service, on the 17<sup>th</sup>, to welcome a returning guest leader, Rabbi Bob Rottenberg, who is looking forward to being with us again after a long absence. Our late Kabbalat Shabbat on the 23<sup>rd</sup> begins at 7:30, led by Marty Cohn. (This is our lean-but-not-mean, no-nonsense, no-food service, over by 8:00.)

## LET THE SUN SHINE IN



In order to respect people's privacy, we are no longer publishing "refuah shlema" (wishes for good health) in the newsletter, yet we do want to express those good wishes. The

Sunshine Committee would like to respond when someone needs a call, a card, a visit, or a prayer for good health. If you contact Faith, she will send a card or see that someone on the sunshine committee spreads a little sunshine where it is needed.

We would like to have a "Kvelling Korner" in the newsletter so we can share good news and accomplishments of our members and their children. Please let us know about simchas and happy events like graduations, engagements, marriages, births, baby-namings, special awards, promotions, etc.. Good news is hard to come by these days, so please be generous and share your good news with your BAJC family.

## FREE! A WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER OF JEWISH NEWS

As a benefit of our congregation's membership in the Union for Reform Judaism, you can receive a free subscription to the **Weekly Briefing**, an e-mail of news about the Union and the greater Jewish world, delivered to your inbox every Friday. To subscribe, go to [www.urj.org/subscribe](http://www.urj.org/subscribe).

## PENNY-WISE



Small fundraising: a penny earned is a penny saved, and the pennies quickly add up to dollars. There are three ongoing "small fundraising" projects that will cost you nothing but will make important contributions to BAJC.

- Give us your used printer cartridges, especially HP, Lexmark, Dell, and Kodak. (Do not give us Epson, Canon BCI, any re-filled cartridges, or toner cartridges from copying machines.) So far this year we have almost \$80 from cartridges, which we have used to purchase needed office supplies.
- Use GOODSEARCH.COM as your search engine. Sign in at [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com), with Brattleboro Area Jewish Community listed as your charity. We just received a check from them for \$48.87. Just imagine how much more it could be if ALL of us clicked on Goodsearch instead of Google! You will readily find the information you're looking for, and BAJC will get a penny for every click. Ask all your friends, relatives, and co-workers to join us in this effort. Our goal is for the next check to be more than \$100.
- Bring **rinsed** deposit cans and bottles to the container in the little shed near the barn. When snow makes the shed inaccessible, you can leave the rinsed cans and bottles on the porch entrance to the shul, or in the hallway.

In these difficult economic times (indeed, in all times) when money is tight, there are still ways you can help bring much-needed funds to our shul. Our strength is in our numbers-- the more who participate and contribute, the better our financial condition will be.

## SJBC

The Significant Jewish Books Club will meet at the shul on Thursday evening, the 15<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 for a potluck supper and discussion of Christopher Moore's *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*. Quite a departure from all our other selections, *Lamb* should provide some interesting discussion, including whether or not it is a "significant Jewish book." However, the selection for February 19<sup>th</sup>, Geraldine Brooks' *People of the Book*, is indeed a significant Jewish book! You are welcome to join for either or both of these discussions (and potluck suppers) and to make recommendations for future book choices. If you would like to order *People of the Book* to read in time for the February get-together, call Faith or Esther.

## 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

### Board of Trustees:

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Sandra Brodsky  
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Immediate Past President: Paul Berch

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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, Yahrtzeits, 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.)