

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

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April 2009

Nissan / Iyar 5769

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## FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

I've had so much positive feedback on my last column – which offered wise counsel from Britain's Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, that I'm presenting here one more of Sacks' ideas, this one on spirituality vs. religion, a topic which may be worth some thought as we approach Passover and prepare to join our ancestors in that quintessential journey.

We often hear it said, "I'm not very religious, but I'm a spiritual person." When we say this, we're expressing our preference for the wonder associated with holiness and mystery over what we sometimes think of as the legalisms and institutionalism of religion.

Sacks challenges us a bit on this. In another of his provocative essays he writes:

*Spirituality is the poetry of the soul. Religion is the prose. Spirituality is the direct encounter with God. Religion is our identification with a group that has encountered the Divine throughout its history...It is almost like the distinction between love and marriage. Love is an emotion. Marriage is an institution...One of the great shortcomings of our time is that we have come to value emotions at the expense of institutions. We place a higher value on love than marriage.*

Sacks goes on to say that, through the course of human history, people have created and protected institutions in part "to give permanence to what is fleeting, stability to the mercurial." He makes reference to John Bayley's moving account of life with Iris Murdoch after she had contracted

Alzheimer's, and the ways in which the most mundane acts within their marriage shone with their own moral beauty. Sachs suggests that we need both the ecstasy and the ongoing rituals. We need not only the joy of seeing the family gathered around the Seder table and connecting with the traditions of our parents and grandparents, but also the rituals of the blessings, the four cups of wine, the four questions, the ten plagues. We need the long stretches of loyalty called for as our ancestors traversed the wilderness as well as the moments of high passion. Even those of us who love poetry can rarely live on it exclusively.

Sacks' words continue to resonate with me as I reflect on the events surrounding the tragic death of baby Talia. Yes, there was ecstasy – when she seemed to recover from her previous setback, and there was our passionate response to lend a hand to Talia's family in recent months, but it also was so comforting to know that when this little angel died there would be the prayers and rituals of our religious tradition, that our Chevra Kadisha would be there lovingly to wash and pray over her body, and that we would come together to offer the ancient prayers as we laid her gently to rest.

B'Shalom,  
Jim



## SAVE THE DATE!

The third annual Israeli Film and Food Festival is scheduled for the weekend of August 22-23.

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

In my non-BAJC life, I provide public relations services to the American Academy of Dermatology as well as the Massachusetts Academy of Dermatology. My non-BAJC world and my BAJC world will come together at Torah study on April 25<sup>th</sup> in parasha *Tazria-M'tzora* (Leviticus 12:1–13:59). *Tazria* describes the diagnosis and treatment by the *kohanim* (priests) of a skin disease called *tzara'at*, commonly translated as leprosy, for which the prescribed treatment was isolation from the community. Once the skin condition healed, the formerly-afflicted person offered sacrifices and could be declared ritually pure again. *M'tzora* also includes the first mention of ritual immersion--bathing in water in a certain manner to purify a person, cleansing him or her from a physical impurity.

*Tazria/Metzora* tells us how our ancestors dealt with mysterious diseases and reminds us that we too have dreaded diseases whose cause and duration are uncertain. Our ancestors established rules regarding the exclusion and reintegration of afflicted individuals. We learn that an individual with *tzara'at* (an oozing wound) was placed outside the camp for seven days, after which the priest went to check the afflicted. If the wound was gone, the person could return to the camp; if not, the priest would return in a week's time to repeat the inspection. Separation from the community was seen as a necessary corrective measure at a time when illness was thought to be a divine punishment for a breach in conduct. When one discovered a skin disease in those times, the whole community assumed that it signified a breach in communal norms, the breaking of a commandment, which warranted a minimum seven-day separation from the community. We learn that everyone, from the lowliest member of the community to Miriam the Prophetess, could be in jeopardy of being placed outside the world of personal and social intimacy and support.

The presence of *tzara'at* also has an impact on the community. When a person is suffering, can the rest go on with the tasks of daily living? Does having someone outside the camp impede the ability of the group to function as a healthy organization? When Miriam is afflicted with *tzara'at*, the entire community comes to a standstill. Everyone's journey comes to a halt when she is placed outside the camp and only when she returns can the group move forward again. What a wonderful model our ancestors provide for us! The life of the community is compromised when someone is left outside the camp, and forward

movement is impossible for the community as long as one individual is outside the camp.

This portion reminds us of essential questions we must ask ourselves as individuals and as a community: Is what we perceive as progress real if it is dependent on removing individuals from our midst? Are we truly moving forward if we walk past those on the margins without extending a hand to them? Do we sometimes act callously to those set apart because we believe that they are different in some way? As Reform Jews, we affirm the importance of inclusion. Our communities extend a welcome to individuals and groups who were once relegated to being "outside the camp," such as intermarried couples, gay men and lesbian women, children born to Jewish fathers but not Jewish mothers. Our modern-day efforts toward inclusion are a reflection of our ongoing commitment to *tikkun olam*, to repairing the less-than-perfect world in which we live. We are responsible for affirming that those who stand on the margins are important members of our society, ready to be brought back into the camp so that they are not left forgotten as the rest of the world presses forward.

Having conducted seven BAJC member coffee klatches, meeting with close to half of our membership, I've learned that there are two closely-held congregational values: (1) BAJC is a welcoming congregation and (2) BAJC places a high priority on our obligation to visit the sick. Over the past few months we have seen an outpouring of support to members who needed assistance and to the Brattleboro community at large as well. We rely on our Spiritual Leader to visit members confined to their homes or a facility, but others also have made special efforts to provide support. We have a Sunshine Committee of a few dedicated members, but as our congregation grows, we need more members to serve on this important committee, whose mission is to send cards, make calls, visit congregants facing illness and crises, and to recognize simchas and celebrations as well. Like our ancestors in the desert, we must remember that none of us makes progress unless all of us participate together as a community. Please contact me to volunteer for this committee.

Yael, Rachel, Jessica and I would like to wish you a peaceful and joyous Pesach.

B'shalom,  
Marty

## SEDER MATCHES

This year, the first and second seders are celebrated on Wednesday, April 8. and Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>. Once again, we will help to make "seder matches." If you have room at your seder table for guests, please contact Julie to let her know how many guests you can accommodate and for which night. If you would like to be invited to a seder, please let Julie know how many adults and/or children and which night. You can also participate in seder matches by checking out our easy-to-use form at [www.bajcvermont.org](http://www.bajcvermont.org) All matches must be arranged before April 2.

## YOM HASHOAH, YOM HA'ATZMAUT, YOM HAZIKARON

On Friday evening April 24, at 7:00, we will be welcoming Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, while also commemorating three important days in our history:

- Yom Hashoah, which occurs on the 21<sup>st</sup>, is our remembrance of the Holocaust;
- Yom Hazikaron, Israeli Memorial Day on the 28<sup>th</sup>, when we remember those who sacrificed their lives for Israel.
- Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day on the 29<sup>th</sup> – (Here's a remarkable happenstance: Israel's Declaration of Statehood was announced in 1948. Abraham, the first of our Patriarchs, was born in the year 1948 of the Hebrew calendar!)

On Yom HaShoah, we are asked not simply to dwell on death but also to recall some of the remarkable acts of courage which took place during the Holocaust, most notably in the Warsaw Ghetto. For our commemoration this year, we have invited David Arfa, our own talented *maggid* (storyteller), to tell us about his latest project, a study of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shaprio, the rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto. Given the subject matter, this service, starting at 7:00, will be geared to adults and older children. The service will be followed by a dessert oneg.

## ZACHOR V' LO TISHKACK

On 27 Nissan (April 21<sup>st</sup> this year) Jewish communities around the world mark Yom Hashoah, the day set aside by the Israeli Knesset as Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorating the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising on Passover eve, April 19, 1943. On that day, a handful of young Jewish men and women, armed

with little more than pistols, stood up against the Nazi battalions and showed the world the meaning of courage and defiance. In the Jewish tradition, we are commanded to remember (*zachor*) and not to forget (*lo tishkach*). On Yom HaShoah, the Day of Holocaust Remembrance, we remember...

We remember the six million Jewish martyrs, including 1.5 million children, who were exterminated in the Holocaust. We remember not only the tragic deaths of the six million, but also their vibrant lives -- as shopkeepers and craftsmen, scientists and authors, teachers and students, parents and children, husbands and wives. We remember the richly hued and ancient Jewish civilizations that were destroyed -- from Salonika, Greece to Vilna, Lithuania.

We remember the fertile soil of European anti-Semitism -- cultivated over centuries by cultural, political, and religious voices -- that created an all-too-receptive climate for the Nazi objective of eliminating the Jewish people, but we also remember the courage of Denmark, as well as Albania, Bulgaria, and Finland, for their extraordinary efforts to protect their own Jewish communities.

We remember the millions of non-Jews -- Poles and Russians, Roma, the disabled, political opponents, and homosexuals -- murdered under the relentless Nazi onslaught. We remember the survivors of the death camps, who endured unimaginable suffering and who have inspired us with their indomitable courage, spirit, and will to live.

We remember the valiant soldiers of the Allied nations who, at great human cost, vanquished the Third Reich. We remember the absence of an Israel in those years. (Had Israel existed, it would have provided a haven when so shamefully few countries were willing to accept Jewish refugees.)

We shall never forget those who perished and we shall never forget those who saved even a single life. It is written in the Talmud: "He who saves one life has saved the world." We remember the courage of thousands of Righteous Persons -- whom we call, in Hebrew, *hasidei umot ha'olam* -- who risked their own lives that others might live.

We shall never forget the importance of speaking out against intolerance, whenever and wherever it occurs. We shall never forget the age-old prophetic vision of a world of justice, harmony, and peace, and we shall never forget that each of us, in ways large and small, can help bring us closer to the realization of that prophetic vision.

## PASSOVER MEMORIES

Last year, the *New York Times* ran a profoundly-moving Passover article. The excerpts here tell of the ingenuity used in concentration camps to survive and even to find ways to make matzo and keep the Passover holiday.

### *Bread of Freedom in Times of Despair* by Joan Nathan

*At a restaurant in the theater district, I sat down to dinner with George Perecman and his sister Frances Greenberg, both concentration camp survivors. When I told them that I was interested in food during the Holocaust, they reacted with disgust.*

*"Food? What food?" asked Mr. Perecman, 83. Then he took the paper napkin off his lap and drew a piece of bread, dividing it into quadrants. "This was our lunch — a quarter the size of a piece of bread." Mrs. Greenberg, who had ordered French onion soup, added, "Dinner was soup, mostly water. Sometimes there was a little meat. For all we knew it was dog or horse meat," she said.*

*Then Mr. Perecman, a watchmaker who owes his survival at Dachau to the bread he received from the German officers for fixing their watches, looked around at the plenty in the restaurant, and said with a heavy Yiddish accent, "I feel like I have become a Holocaust denier myself. It's so hard to believe that it really happened. But it did. The Passover Haggadah should be rewritten to include the Holocaust."*

*In the past, talk of survival at concentration and internment camps, including food or the lack thereof, has been considered largely off limits. When Cara De Silva edited and published "In Memory's Kitchen" in 1996, a manuscript of remembered recipes written by women interred in Terezin, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, some readers feared that that recipes trivialized the dire conditions in the camps. "Until recently in Israel people were ashamed to talk about food," said Yehudit Inbar, curator of the museum division of Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial. Then people started sharing stories. "We now see that when people had no food, talking about food or even writing recipes became tools of the mind to survive. They were signs of hope," said Mrs. Inbar*

*A few weeks ago, Hadassa Carlebach discussed the work during the war of her activist father, Rabbi Zalman Schneerson, who was born in Russia and moved to France in 1935. He was responsible for hiding many Jews, mostly children whose parents*

*had been sent to the death camps. In 1944, with help from the French Resistance, he found hiding places for about 60 people in farmhouses in the countryside near Grenoble. For Passover, they wanted to find a way to make matzo. "We had a little wheat, which we milled into flour for Passover," said Mrs. Carlebach, 80, who now lives in Brooklyn. The local farmers baked in a communal oven. "It was too dangerous for us to go there during the day, so in the middle of the night we went in, burned the oven to kosher it, and baked the matzo in a hurry, while the dogs were barking," she said. "I was so scared, but we had one matzo per person for Pesach with the wine that we made ourselves from raisins. Besides the danger, we celebrated with the sincere hope that we were going to be liberated.*

*Mrs. Carlebach showed me desperate letters from people in the French confinement camps requesting matzos and thanking her father for providing them. These camps, less strict than the concentration camps, housed over 100,000 people including about 75,000 Jews. According to Marc Masurovsky, a French specialist at the Holocaust Memorial Museum, all but about 3,000 of them were later killed in the death camps. Mrs. Carlebach also showed me sketches of the plans that her father made for a matzo oven he built in 1941 when their family was hiding with many children in a derelict chateau near Marseilles. "The oven was in a makeshift synagogue," said Bertha Schwarz, 83, whom Rabbi Schneerson rescued from the Brens internment camp and took to the chateau. "All of us children were mobilized to help with the rolling out, baking, shipping and packing the matzo for the camps."*

*But none of this compares with the ingenuity of Pearl Benisch, who lives in Brooklyn. She remembers Passover in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany in the spring of 1945, just days before her liberation. "We had nothing to eat but watery soup, with bread once a week," she told me in a very quiet voice. "But I was one of the lucky ones. I was working in a place where we peeled potatoes and turnips. I cut three turnips in narrow rounds, covered them up with a piece of brown paper and hid them in my shoes. "When we had our Seder in the peeling room with one woman keeping watch for the guards. When the other women moaned that there was no matzo, I said, 'they are here, they are under the cover.' They opened the brown paper and there were the three round turnip matzos." Then, Mrs. Benisch, now in her late 80's, paused and said in a whisper, "Only God can make matzo from turnips."*

## BAJC AT THE OVERFLOW SHELTER

This is the second in our series of reflections by BAJC members who have volunteered at the Overflow shelter or who have provided food for it. This piece was written by Michael.

*When I arrived at the side doors of the First Baptist Church just before 5 on December 24th, I sensed the relief of a handful of folks who were milling outside the locked doors. As evening approached and they had made their way over to the church, you could tell they were looking forward to the hot meal and a warm room to hang out in. I had been somewhat nervous about volunteering on Christmas Eve because I wanted Christmas eve to be special for these folks, and since it wasn't MY holiday, I wasn't sure I was the one to help make it so. I arrived armed with a handful of VCR cassettes of various Christmas specials rented at First Run (the group selected Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye in White Christmas to watch that night), Christmas cookies (the pfeffernusse I brought were much less of a hit than the Petit Ecolier), and some eggnog. But I really shouldn't have been worried about making it feel like Christmas at the Overflow Shelter because Reverend Suzanne Andrews and her congregation saw to that. The Christmas service was stunning, with the congregation singing carols from the perimeter of the sanctuary and holding candles. After the service, Pastor Sue spent a long time in the room where everyone was going to sleep, and she spoke privately to many. One of the folks who organizes the work at the shelter pulled Bobbe and me aside and told us to place the gifts she had for everyone under the Christmas tree after everyone was asleep that night. Each present had been carefully wrapped and had the name of one of the homeless persons written on the card. The children received extra gifts. Experiencing the intensity of the work necessary to house and feed so many, and the difficulties inherent in welcoming alcoholics and mentally ill people into an already too full room, it's clear that "tikun olam" is not easy, but I feel very comforted and humbled knowing how much this one church and the town's interfaith community are doing for people in need.*

## SJBC

The Significant Jewish Books Club is reading Letty Cottin Pogrebin's *Three Daughters* for discussion at its meeting on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, and Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife* for its meeting on May 28<sup>th</sup>. Join us for either or both book discussions and potluck dinners at 6:30. Contact Faith for more information.

## ADULT EDUCATION IN APRIL

**Singing is Like Praying Twice** - 8:30 am on April 4<sup>th</sup> – learn and practice the music of the Shabbat service; no registration required; just drop in and sing.

**Torah study** – 10:00 to noon on April 25<sup>th</sup> -no registration required; just drop in and study Torah (in English)

**Yoga and the Jewish Spirit** – 6:00 pm on April 26<sup>th</sup> – no registration required; just drop in to meditate and relax. Bring a yoga mat, foam block and cotton blanket.

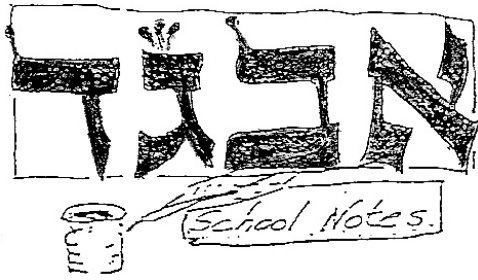
Please register in advance for these two classes at [www.bajcvermont.org](http://www.bajcvermont.org), or call the adult ed voicemail (257-1959), or Andi at 254-4609. There is a \$10 fee per class for people who are not members of BAJC.

**Anguish and Complexity in Israel and Gaza** — Sunday evening, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 5:30-7:30: A focused conversation among friends on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its present state of anguish and complexity.

**The Jar of Tears** -- a story performance by David Arfa - Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 3:00-5:00; Based on the life of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, this story performance shares a series of personal letters addressed to the Master of the World that Rabbi Shapiro wrote and tucked into a milk jug which he buried in the ghetto. The letters provide a portrait of his life, the pain he endured, and how he managed to stay a compassionate human being even though his whole life and community were shattered. BAJC member David Arfa is dedicated to Judaism's storytelling heritage, bringing stories to life at prayer services, family programs and interfaith community events throughout New England, *The Jar of Tears* David's newest story, was recently performed at Poland's International Storytelling Festival..

## PASSOVER YIZKOR

In addition to a yahrzeit anniversary, four times a year we are expected to recite Kaddish together for our family and friends who are no longer with us--on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Pesach, and Shavuot. The Yizkor service provides us with scenes from our past and thousands of little memories that constitute a large part of ourselves, our hopes, and what we represent—memories planted in our hearts by beloved people in our past, memories that strengthen and comfort us, memories that inspire us to do good in the world. This year's Pesach Yizkor will be held at 6:00 on Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, the last day of Passover, and will conclude by 6:30. A minyan is required for the service, so please try to attend. Yahrzeit candles are available for purchase at the shul.



We were happy, we were brave, we celebrated Purim despite some dodgy but very beautiful weather. Many of the students and teachers came in costume or created them in class, including the students of Kita Aleph who made costumes that illustrated their own Hebrew names. Their teacher, Judith, also came as herself, and described, with great animation, the beheading of Holofernes. Food, of course, was not neglected. We noshed on Hamantaschen baked in our own kitchen by Martin, Ava, Jonah, and Emily of Kita Bet.

Pesach is next on the horizon, early this year, on April 8<sup>th</sup>. Although all of the classes will be studying the story and symbolism of Pesach, we will not have a celebration during Hebrew School. If you do not yet have seder plans, please let me know so that I can hook you up with a kid-friendly seder. If you are having a kid-friendly seder and have a few extra seats, please let me know that as well! There's room for everyone, and Pesach is really too fun to miss.

I am also beginning to think of next year. As regular readers will know, the teachers have been struggling with the enormous task of teaching, well . . . EVERYTHING. I would therefore like to meet with as many Hebrew School parents as possible beginning on April 6<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 to discuss what you want your children to be doing during Hebrew School hours, and how we can best support you at home. Other meetings can be scheduled as needed or you can contact me privately. Your opinions and ideas are necessary if we are to continue to improve our Hebrew School.

B'Shalom,  
Mara <maravermontel.net — 802.875.1015>

## JUDAICA SALE

BAJC has catalogues available for ordering all kinds of Judaica at discounted prices, including talleism, tallis bags, yarmulkes, candlesticks, jewelry, books, toys and games, seder plates, gift items, etc.. See Faith to shop and order. Also, you might check Vermont Artisan Designs in Brattleboro for a special 20 % off sale on all its Judaica items (e.g. menorahs, seder plates, mezzuzahs).

## BIRKAT HACHAMAH

According to Talmud, the sun returns once every twenty-eight years to the position it had when God created it on the fourth day of Creation. Celebrate with stories, dance, song, and learning workshops led by Jewish environmental educators from the Teva Learning Center in New York. Focus on the sun as a renewable resource for food, energy, and happiness with Beth Jacob Synagogue at Noble Hall, Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier on Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. Suggested donation is \$5 for a family.

Beth Jacob also invites us to attend their community seder on the second night of Passover (Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>) at 6:00. Call Beth to make reservations and to tell her what vegetarian potluck dish you will bring. The cost is \$10 for an adult, \$5 for a child, free for children under age six.

## THE SOUND OF SEDERS

Family groups at table  
changes year to year  
some born some gone  
different faces here

But the blessings never change  
No the blessings never change  
I hear my father's voice

Family roles at service shift  
Time moves up the stairs  
to another generation  
other members lead the prayers  
But the blessings never change  
No the blessings never change  
I hear my father's melody

And with each ringing memory  
of syllable and song  
I taste my father's music

Poem by Ree Goodman, from *Celebrations – The Book of Jewish Festivals*

## WARNING OF ANNUAL BAJC MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Monday, July 6th at 6:30 pm at the synagogue

Agenda includes annual reports, election of trustees, vote on the proposed budget

NOTE: A barbecue will precede the meeting.

## 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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e-mail: [schuster@sover.net](mailto:schuster@sover.net)  
Office phone: 802-257-1959  
Office hours: 3:30-6:30, on  
Mondays when Hebrew school  
is in session, or by appointment

Newsletter editor: Faith Schuster  
Newsletter design and production:  
[martin@cohnpr.com](mailto:martin@cohnpr.com)  
Newsletter deadline: the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month

Webmaven: Julie Strothman



## 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 5769. 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.)