

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

May 2009

Iyar / Sivan 5769

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

I hope that all of you had a sweet and meaningful Passover this year. Many thanks to Julie who once again organized seder matches to make sure that everyone who wanted to attend a seder could do so and that others could carry out the mitzvah of welcoming the stranger. This year I had the opportunity to participate in four seders, each of which seemed to have a message for me – and maybe for some of you as well. Let me tell you about them.

Because of our kids' schedules, our family seder this year was on the second night, thus making it possible for us to attend the Williamsville Seder on the first night. I'd been hearing about this now eight-year-old event for some time and was delighted that we could be present for the potluck seder, beautifully co-led by our own Kim Friedman. With 95 people attending, this spirited seder was a reminder of the extraordinary magnetism of Passover, attracting to seder tables Jews who might never set foot in a synagogue and who may even reject traditional belief in a divine being. The Passover story is indeed the master story of our people, filled with the richest of symbols and capable of bringing Jews together as nothing else can.

The second seder was at my daughter Mira's home in Boston, with our son Noah joining us electronically from Kolkata via Skype. Joining with us for the first time was cousin Anat from Israel, who told us of her own most memorable--and embarrassing--experience at an Israel Defense Forces seder while she was in the army. When the time came for the four questions, everyone checked serial numbers to figure out who was the youngest, and it was Anat who had to stand on a chair and sing them, even though she can't carry a tune!

The family Haggadah, revised each year by our kids, was filled with innovations, including having us go out into the yard to search our hearts for the internal *chometz* accumulated over the past year. We wrote these down on pieces of paper, folded them up, then burned them in a bowl before going indoors to the seder table. At the Williamsville seder, we also did something new in my experience--as we recited the plagues, we spilled not one but three drops of wine for the last and most terrible of the plagues.

Recognizing how innovations are being introduced in our family seders, Julie has offered to set up a page on our BAJC website so that we might share some of them. Please send in innovative elements of your seders to me. I'll keep contributions anonymous and send them along to Julie.

The third and fourth seders in which I participated this year were at nursing homes for senior citizens, where there were some very poignant messages. Regardless of their health status, including some cases of dementia, they were mouthing the words and joining in the melodies, which clearly were too deeply ingrained to be lost. Their unbounded pleasure and their contagious joy teach us that as we get older we must savor each moment and take nothing for granted. These four seders together gave me a renewed sense of the resilience of our people and a revitalized sense of hope. Next year in Jerusalem!

B'Shalom,
Jim

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Like Jim, I too celebrated with four Seders and I too enjoyed using my homemade Haggadah. Even more, I enjoyed sitting around the table with family and friends and eating delicious food. For me the traditional foods are as important as the telling of the story. In fact, food is important in the celebration of many Jewish holidays. Who doesn't look forward to the apples and honey of Rosh Hashanah or the latkes of Hanukah or the blintzes of Shavuot?

On Sivan 7 (May 30th) we will be celebrating Shavuot, the anniversary of the day the Ten Commandments were given to Moses and the Children of Israel. We will celebrate Shavuot with special joy this year as we welcome Louisa Strothman to our adult congregation as a Bat Mitzvah, and also as we remember our loved ones in a Yizkor service. Although we will not be staying up all night on Shavuot to study, many Jews do this. Why? One teaching says that the night before the Torah was given, the Israelites retired early to be well-rested for the momentous day ahead, but they overslept. With God already waiting on the mountaintop. Moses had to wake the people. Since we all should act as if we were present at Mt. Sinai, some stay up all night learning Torah. As for food, Shavuot has long been associated with dairy dishes, especially blintzes and cheesecake. What's the connection? After some research, I discovered four possible reasons for this tradition:

(1) Since the Jews were not bound by the laws of kashrut before receiving the Torah, they did not have separate dishes for meat and milk. The moment they received the Law, they realized that their cooking utensils were no longer acceptable so they ate only uncooked dairy products until they could kosher their utensils. (2) Another tradition links this custom to Song of Songs 4:11 that can be read as likening the knowledge of Torah to milk and honey: "Sweetness drops from your lips, O bride; honey and milk are under your tongue." (3) A third reason comes from Psalms 68:16, which refers to the Giving of Torah in the following way: "O majestic mountain, Mount Bashan; O jagged mountain, Mount Bashan." The Hebrew word for jagged or craggy is *gavnunim*, which sounds like *g'vinah*, the Hebrew word for cheese. Therefore, we eat cheese in remembrance and honor of the mountain that is sometimes called Sinai and sometimes called Bashan, always revered as the dwelling place from which God spoke to Israel.

(4) My favorite reason for eating dairy foods on Shavuot is that according to a legend, when Pharaoh's daughter found the baby Moses in the Nile River, he would only nurse from a Hebrew woman. To honor Moses's loyalty, we eat only dairy products on Shavuot. There you go--four possible explanations for a tradition.

As BAJC president, I have found that I often have to research a tradition. Often when I ask why BAJC does a certain prayer or practice, the answer is "that's the way we've always done it," but one of the beautiful values that BAJC holds is being open to new approaches. As I review notes from the member coffee klatches, I am struck by the ways we respect tradition while still considering new approaches. For example, when we were in West Village Meeting House, parents of our religious school students were able to get to know one another in the lobby while waiting for their children. Now, in our own smaller space, that traditional interaction is missing, so we are thinking about new ways to get parents to feel more connected to each other and to BAJC. Another tradition that may need tweaking is our potlucks. Some young parents have said that having Shabbat services at 6:00 followed by a potluck at 7:00 doesn't fit their children's eating schedule. Other members didn't like feeling rushed through the service to get to the potluck, yet when we used to have the potluck at 6:00 and the service at 7:00, some felt rushed through the suppertime socializing. Oy! One new approach might be to have a designated "young families service" with the meal first. Another idea is to coordinate a "share Shabbat at your home" rather than having the Shabbat meal at shul. Some people also felt that preparing food for the potluck was just one task too many for them at the end of a busy week, so we might consider having a "pizza potluck" now and then. And, of course, there is always the "fourth Friday" Kabbalat Shabbat service with no food at all!

Another "new tradition" to consider is Confirmation, a ceremony that traditionally takes place two or three years after b'nai mitzvah. Students "confirm" their commitment to Judaism and to Jewish life at an age when, after two or three years of advanced Jewish studies (and socializing), they are prepared to make their emotional and intellectual commitment to Judaism. Perhaps this is a tradition we should create for BAJC teens. What do you think?

B'shalom,
Marty

ADULT EDUCATION IN MAY

Please note: there are some errors in the Adult Education flyer that was in the March newsletter. Check the website or the newsletter each month for the month's offerings, or contact Andi.

Please register in advance for these four courses:

Confronting Holocaust Denial – Thursday, May 7th, 6:30-8:30 – Thomas White, Coordinator of Educational Outreach for the Cohen Center for Holocaust Studies, will teach about the context and origins of Holocaust denial, the categories of Holocaust distortion, and the motives of those who deny, using documented facts to show that Holocaust denial has no basis in truth.

Learn-to-read-Hebrew – beginning May 13th at 5:30 and continuing for eight to ten Wednesdays. Taught by Faith Schuster. The required textbook must be ordered in advance.

Tzedukah – Sunday morning. May 17th, 10:00-noon –Learn from Jackie Gould about the Jewish roots of tzedukah and how it can be undertaken in ways that affect both giver and receiver.

The Children of Abraham – Shabbat afternoon, May 9th from 2:00-4:00 –taught by Javed Chaudhri. Brought back by popular demand, this class will explore links between Judaism and Islam and their shared beliefs, laws, culture, morality, and practices, as well as tracing areas of divergence.

Registration is not necessary for these two drop-in classes:

Yoga and the Jewish Spirit – Sunday evening, May 17th at 6:30

Torah Study – We usually study Torah on 2nd and 4th Saturday mornings, but because we are blessed with b'nai mitzvah services Saturday mornings in May and June, Torah study will take place on **Wednesday evenings at 7:00, May 6 and 20.**

MUSIC IN MANCHESTER

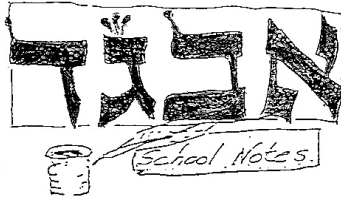
Israel Congregation of Manchester and the Manchester Music Festival are co-hosting an afternoon musicale that highlights the significant contributions of Jewish composers to the world's rich musical repertoire. Performed by Manchester Musical Festival string and piano musicians, "*The Ties that Bind: A Celebration of Jewish Musical Heritage*" will be held on Sunday, May 24, 2009 from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm in the main sanctuary at Israel Congregation, followed by a social hour and an appetizing dessert buffet..

Founded more than 35 years ago, the Manchester Music Festival is a non-profit organization. "We are thrilled to be able to perform in this wonderful space which is not only comfortable and beautiful but has great acoustical qualities", explains Ariel Rudiakov, the Manchester Music Festival's Artistic Director. "Reaching out to all members of the community who are interested in exploring Jewish musical roots adds to the depth and breadth of our programming array." Tickets will be available through the Israel Congregation office (802-362-4578).

"HEED THE PROPHETS"

These are the words of Chancellor Arnold M. Eisen, one of the world's foremost experts on American Judaism and the seventh chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary

When in doubt as to the proper ends of political and social reform, heed the prophets. The poor must be fed. The homeless must be housed. Murder must be stopped. The planet and its species must be protected. It is up to us figure out how best to do these things, weighing one injustice against another and justice against compassion. Our world is such a mess. We are tempted sometimes to do nothing or to wait for God to fix it for us. But this our tradition forbids—and besides, so much that needs doing is entirely clear. The prophets repeated the agenda over and over: Feed the poor, house the homeless, stop murder and genocide, free slaves, guard the Earth.



Once again we celebrated the coming of Pesach by searching for *chometz* --the bits of bread and crackers that were hidden by Kita Aleph. Once we cleared all the *chometz*, we went outside to burn it...in the rain!! The rain made this day different from all other days, mainly because the weather has been remarkably cooperative most Mondays this year. As you may have noticed, we had no snow days! Therefore, the last day of school will be June 1st, with all appropriate ceremony and celebration.

Almost as soon as Hebrew school ends, we begin to plan for the next academic year. Over the summer, the teachers meet several times to plan the next year and to discuss how we can best serve the needs of the kids and their families. During this school year I have, on several occasions, used this space to ask the parents to tell us what those needs are. This has proved to be spotty communicating at best, so we are again soliciting parents' opinions and ideas via meetings led by Marty Cohn in the manner of the coffee klatches he has held this past year. I hope to be able to share with you soon the results of these meetings,

Of one thing I am already certain—Jewish life exists both in the congregation and within the family. The education of a Jewish child requires both the congregation and the family. While at times parents may despair about providing Jewish education, I believe that the most enduring lessons are learned at home. As always, the Hebrew school teachers are ready to support you in any way they can in bringing Jewish practices into your homes.

B'Shalom,
Mara

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE JEWISH...

...to learn to play mah jongg. If you are interested in joining the lively group that plays on Wednesday afternoons, or if you want to learn and then schedule another time to play, contact Faith to schedule two-sessions of learn-to-play, with the time and day determined by your availability.

NOMINATIONS FOR BAJC BOARD OF TRUSTEES

This year four Trustees will be elected for terms of three years. If you are interested in being on the Board, please submit your name to Paul, chair of the *ad hoc* Nominating Committee, by May 8th, along with a brief statement introducing yourself and telling why you would like to serve. Board members are expected to attend monthly meetings (usually the fourth Monday of the month), to chair at least one committee, to be active on other standing and *ad hoc* committees, and to maintain contact with a designated group of members on a regular basis. In addition, Board members plan and attend services, potlucks, and other events, and generally act as "ambassadors" within our congregation and in the larger Jewish community. Our by-laws require that Trustees be Jewish, as well as being members in good standing.

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.



SAVE THE DATE!

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

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:

Paul Berch
Sandra Brodsky
Martin Cohn
Mary Copans
Michael Knapp
Bobbe Ragouzeos
Joe Rosen
Allen Ross
Faith and Abe Schuster
Julie Strothman
Randy Terk
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Officers:

President: : Martin Cohn
Vice-president Julie Strothman
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Secretary: Bobbe Ragouzeos
Immediate Past President: Paul Berch

e-mail: 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
Newsletter deadline: the 15th 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.)