

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

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November 2009

Cheshvan / Kislev 5770

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## THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE—A LETTER *FROM* THE EDITOR

Shalom chaverim,

Adapting to change is almost always difficult...perhaps easy when the changes feel good and not so easy when the changes make us feel uncomfortable or insecure. Accepting changes and adapting to them takes time and patience. Change in spiritual leadership, no matter the reason for the change, almost always creates uncertainty and discomfort for a congregation, but it can also be a time of opportunity and growth. BAJC is going through changes now that require the congregation to be patient and willing to wait and see what develops.

The important thing is to realize that, with or without paid leadership, we are a congregation--a community--as we have been for almost forty years. During that time we have seen our leadership change many times, both the modality of leadership and the individuals employed to be our leaders. BAJC was born and grew under many years of devoted lay leadership. It further developed under a dozen years of leadership from four different rabbis, followed by eight years of the wise, warm, and wonderful spiritual leadership of Jim Levinson. In those years, Jim helped us to sense what we want and need on our spiritual journey as a congregation. Jim led us in a good direction and put us on a good road, giving us the strength and the wisdom, to travel that road even without him.

If for no other reason than to honor our past, we must continue to be a vital and meaningful congregation as we look for new spiritual leadership, and we must be ready to adjust and adapt to that new leadership when it is in place. It is unlikely that we will find the one perfect rabbi for our congregation...one who will be approved of and admired and loved by every single member and guest. In fact, there has never been--and, I dare say, never will be-- such a rabbi, just as there has never been a Jewish congregation where every member agrees on everything—or, on anything! So let us be patient and supportive throughout this transitional time and let us be optimistic about both the near and distant future of our congregation. Let us participate in the process and embrace the many possibilities of change. Let us attend services (no matter who is leading), let us participate in meetings and in the myriad activities that go on at our shul, and let us make our opinions known to the Board of Trustees that governs the congregation.

L'chaim and yasher koach to BAJC as it accepts the challenges of change.

B'tikvah,  
Faith

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

As I write this column, the High Holidays are behind us. I truly appreciate all the feedback that many of you have given me. I would like to thank Rabbi Jan Salzman and Kate Judd for leading us in meaningful services. Thanks also to all those that participated.

Looking ahead, we have Shabbat services scheduled with lay leaders from our congregation for November and December, and we are planning a gala Chanukah celebration for Friday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, the first night of Chanukah, with a traditional latke potluck and the lighting of many chanukiot.

My Rosh Hashanah sermon and my October newsletter column based on the concept of "Hineni", which means, "Here I am." "Hineni" is the response when God personally calls on someone to do something difficult and important. Abraham? "Hineni" Moses? "Hineni." It's a very complete and emotionally-charged response, implying, "Here I am: ready, willing and able to do what is asked."

At BAJC, we are calling on our members to do something difficult and important... to help us fulfill our mission "to provide a context and structure for people to be Jewish together in a rural environment."

We are fortunate that many of you are already "here," participating in membership, ritual, cemetery, fundraising, High Holiday, and Chevra Kaddisha committees. However, we need more of you to say "Hineni" for the following tasks:

- a. Adult Education Committee – Participation in Jewish educational experiences fosters community. We need one or two people to coordinate an adult learning program.
- b. Sunshine Committee – There are BAJC congregants facing illnesses and crises. As a community, we do reach out to these individuals. We need people to be available when folks need attention or help.
- c. Education Committee – We have dedicated teachers, a school director and a committee working to insure that our children have a meaningful Jewish education. The committee will be meeting once a month (the next three dates are November 22, December 20 and January 24 from ten to noon), and they would welcome your participation.
- d. Building & Grounds Committee – Winter is coming and repairs will be necessary. We need a committee to maintain optimum

conditions in our buildings and to arrange for repairs when needed.

- e. Social Action – Since the 1950s, tikkun olam (repairing the world) has come to connote social action and social justice work. Join with other BAJC members to develop and implement programs that fulfill this mitzvah, this commandment.

I understand that there are many forces pulling at your time and commitments that you must fulfill, but I am asking you to find some time and energy for BAJC, recognizing its importance not only in your own life but also in our Jewish community and in the larger Brattleboro and world community. Stand up and say "Hineni." It's easy to volunteer or to get answers to any questions you may have. Just contact me!

You can see the complete list of BAJC committees by visiting our Web site [www.bajcvermont.org](http://www.bajcvermont.org).

B'shalom,  
Marty

PS Two High Holiday post notes:

1. A tradition at BAJC is for us to read aloud anonymous personal shortcomings during the Kol Nidre service. After these al cheyts are read, they are destroyed. I want you to know that this year, I removed the pieces of paper from my pocket and my puppy, Mollie, immediately ate them.
2. After the high holidays, with my slate wiped clean, I immediately began to collect shortcomings for the coming year. Rather than wait until next Kol Nidre, I would like to publicly apologize to Mary for mistakenly not displaying the beautiful flowers she donated on Yom Kippur.

## SERVICES IN NOVEMBER

Shabbat Torah services will take place on the first and third Saturday morning of the month at 10:00. The service on November 7<sup>th</sup> will be led by Bob; on the 21<sup>st</sup> the service will be led by Moss and his daughter Elkanah. Kabbalat Shabbat services (welcoming the Sabbath) will be held on the second and fourth Friday nights at 7:30, led by Marty Cohn. There is no "potluck Shabbat" this month.



## **APOLOGY AND APPRECIATION**

In last month's newsletter, the article about the Tree of Life misnamed the generous donor. It was not Elliott, but Elliott who, along with his wife

Pamela, made this extraordinary donation to our congregation. Although Elliott and Pamela are members of Congregation Ahavas Achim in Keene, they have frequently made donations to BAJC. The Tree of Life they have donated will be installed this month. It will provide a way for people to memorialize and/or honor loved ones. As the leaves are engraved with names over time, the Tree will be an ongoing source of income to the BAJC building fund. Each of the hundred leaves on the tree can be engraved for a donation of \$250, which would put a potential of \$25,000 in the building fund! For more information about this fundraising project, contact Marty Cohn.

## **KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON**

In addition to the newsletter and frequent e-mail announcements and reminders, and regularly-updated website information, minutes from the Board of Trustees meetings, Treasurer's reports, annual meeting reports, etc., are available to members who request them from Marty ([bajcprez@gmail.com](mailto:bajcprez@gmail.com)). Board meetings are open to the membership but please let a Board member know when you want to attend and, if you wish to speak, please request permission in advance of the meeting so you can be put on the agenda.

For privacy reasons, we are no longer printing "Refuah Shlema" notices in our newsletter, but we definitely want to know what's going on so we can extend good wishes and say prayers for people who are experiencing illness or injuries or other health problems. Please let Faith know when you hear of a member who might benefit from a card, a call, a visit, or some kind of help.

## **RABBI SEARCH COMMITTEE CONTINUES ITS WORK**

Congregation Shir Heharim has been blessed with strong and stable spiritual leadership for the past eight years. Now we are faced with the responsibility of selecting a new spiritual leadership. Participation by BAJC members is critical to the success of this endeavor.

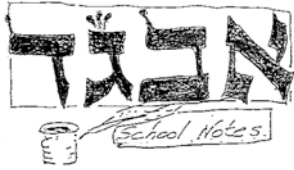
The rabbi search committee, composed of Paul (Chair), Marty Cohn, Julie, Louisa, Michael, and Enid, is asking that each member of the congregation assist in the search process by letting the committee know your opinions, thoughts and feelings as to the characteristics and qualities that you would like to see in a BAJC rabbi. You can provide input by talking individually with any member of the committee in person or on the phone, or you can e-mail [search@bajcvermont.org](mailto:search@bajcvermont.org), or write to Rabbi Search Committee, BAJC, P.O. Box 2353, Brattleboro 05303. Additionally, the committee has one more open-house meeting, scheduled for November 8<sup>th</sup> between 11:00 and noon at the synagogue to hear your concerns, opinions and questions face-to-face. If possible, call a committee member to let the committee know you will attend.

## **COHEN CENTER WORKSHOP**

The Cohen Center for Holocaust studies is offering an exciting and unique workshop on December 11<sup>th</sup>: **Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars Confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**. Location: Mountain View Room, Young Student Center, Keene State College., Registration deadline for this class is December 4<sup>th</sup>. The fee is \$85. For a registration form or more information contact Tom White @ 603-358-2746

## **YOGA AND THE JEWISH SPIRIT**

Kim is continuing her very well-received yoga class this year on the second Sunday of every month at 6:30. She welcomes participation by new members as well as returnees, beginners as well as those experienced in yoga. She asks that people planning to come to the class each month let her know ahead of time so she can assess on a month-by-month basis whether or not to hold class. You can contact Kim if you have any questions about the class or if you want more information.



Dear Friends,

I'd like to begin with a question "What fruit juice would you like to bring to our party?" Let me explain: I read about a summer party at which a big fancy feast would be provided if everyone could bring a little juice from fresh fruit to make a collective, amazing fruit punch. Well, sure enough one guest thought "I am already so busy--how can I find time to collect fresh juice? Besides, who will know if I only bring water?" Some say this was Anansi the spider, others (like me) say it was Herschel of Ostropol, that great prankster.

On the night of the party, everyone poured their liquid into the giant punch bowl. After the host with the most made a toast, everyone realized their amazing fruit punch was just water! Herschel wasn't the only one to imagine his contribution did not matter and would not make a difference.

Our school is like this party. Yes, we provide four classes filled with age-appropriate Hebrew language lessons, meaningful Torah and prayer explorations, virtual tours of Israel, holiday celebrations, personalized b'nai Mitzvah training, games, songs, storytelling, and even tasty, homemade snacks made fresh each week. In addition, this year we have a dedicated Hebrew language tutor working with students from every class individually or in small groups.

Even with all of this happening, it is up to each of us to provide the fruit juice. We need you to contribute--everything from the sustained commitment of joining the education committee to supporting holiday celebrations, helping with substitute teaching, or providing administrative and fundraising support. Please remember that deepening these Monday experiences within your family by providing attention and time with your child and corresponding with your teacher is the most important work of all.

So I ask again: what fruit juice would you like to bring to our party? Please write me and your teachers at [school@bajcvermont.org](mailto:school@bajcvermont.org) with contributions, ideas, questions, or just a friendly hello. Most importantly, please remember that our part-time school, with its very part-time staff, welcomes your input.

B'shalom ,  
David

## ABOUT BOOKS

While preparing to set up a library in the BAJC office, we have decided to give away a selection of books that we can't use. The books are stacked in no particular order in the barn. Although many of the books have Jewish content, not all are about Judaism. There are books of fiction, history, biography, philosophy, ethics, humor, Jewish living, holidays, and more. There are hardcovers, paperbacks, boxed sets. There are even some children's books. You can browse through the books any Monday or Wednesday afternoon or any time the synagogue is open or the barn door is up. Take as many as you want. If you're so inclined, make a small donation when you find some treasures, but there's no obligation to do that. If you know any book collector or bookseller who might want to buy some of these books at bargain prices (or even just take them), please let them know about this opportunity, and have them contact Faith.

We also have a limited selection of new books (some multiple copies) for sale at ridiculously low prices. Here's what we have:

1. *Bat Mitzvah*— a \$15 book for \$8
2. *Choosing Judaism* — a \$10 book for \$4
3. *Jewish Family Life—Traditions, Holidays, and Values for Today's Parents and Children.*-- a \$34 book for only \$10.
4. *The New Jewish Wedding* – a \$14 book for only \$7
5. *Finding God – Ten Jewish Responses* –a \$10 book for \$4
6. *Putting God on the Guest List—How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Bar or Bat Mitzvah* – and *Putting God on the Guest List—for Kids* --\$12 books for \$8 each
7. *Six Jewish Spiritual Paths – A Rationalist Looks at Spirituality* ) – a \$22 book for only \$10
8. *Gates of Mitzvah – A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle* (a CCAR book) – a \$22 book for only \$10
9. *The Year Mom Got Religion – One Woman's Midlife Journey* – a \$19.95 book for \$6

You can purchase these books in the BAJC office. BAJC members also can have a copy of our old siddur, *Gates of Prayer*, at no cost. See Faith about books.

While on the subject of books: the Significant Jewish Books Club is reading is *A Pigeon and a Boy* by Meir Shalav, to be discussed at a meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30. The book they will be reading for late January is *Shanghai Diary* by Ursula Bacon. People are welcome to come to any or all the book discussions / potluck suppers. The club meets approximately every six weeks, usually on a Thursday night. For more information about the SJBK or to order books, contact Faith.

## 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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## 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 5770. 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.)