

# CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

## (Song of the Mountains)



### The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

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January 2010

Tevet / Shevet 5770

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#### **MINYASTICS**

“Minyastics” is a new word I learned--a made-up noun defined as “the exercise and effort needed to gather a minyan of ten people for a religious service.” This is an exercise frequently practiced by the BAJC folks who plan and/or lead services when they know a person needs to say Kaddish and, like other exercise, is good for the body and the spirit!

The Kaddish prayer, recited traditionally by mourners and by people remembering the anniversary of the death of a loved one, requires that the mourner stand in front of (or with) a minyan of ten adults, publicly re-affirming his or her faith in God despite the deeply-felt loss of a loved one. Some believe that doing this gives merit to the deceased in the eyes of God. More important, I think, is that saying this prayer in community gives support and succor to the mourner.

Because BAJC doesn't have a daily prayer service and because we can't guarantee a minyan even at scheduled services, when you need a minyan so you can say Kaddish, , please call the office (or me) several days in advance of the date so the “minyastics” team can do the exercise of gathering a minyan, .

A reminder: it is a long-held tradition to light a yahzeit candle on the eve of the anniversary of the death of a loved one. There is no special prayer to say at that time, but it is a time for a few moments of memory and introspection, perhaps speaking the words of our hearts as the flickering flame of the Yahrzeit candle helps to remind us of the departed soul of our loved one. We publish yahrzeit dates in our newsletter as a reminder to you to attend a service close to the date. We also have yahrzeit candles available at the shul. If there are names you wish to add to the BAJC list at any time, call the office (or me) with the person's name and the Hebrew date of death, . If you don't know the Hebrew date, we can easily convert it from the “American” month, day, and year. It is customary to make a donation to honor the memory of the person for whom you light a candle and/or say Kaddish, just as it is customary for a congregation to gather in support of a mourner.

In the book *God Whispers*, author Karyn D. Kedar says that praying and expressing gratitude in community is so important because “we have sustained ourselves as a people because we have prayed together, celebrated together, cried together, and rejoiced together. We have sustained ourselves because we have passed certain practices and traditions down from one generation to another. We have sustained ourselves because we knew, long ago, that the only way to survive as a People was to intertwine our lives with one another, like the twisted Havdalah candle.” Let the tradition of worshipping together and supporting each other continue in our congregation.

B'shalom,  
Faith

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

January not only marks a new secular year but also the halfway point of my BAJC presidency. While I can look back at all that has occurred in the last year and a half, I am excited about all that is coming up.

First, we have been able to have wonderful and meaningful services led by members of our congregation for the past three months. This will continue until we are able to identify a rabbi.

Second, our rabbinic search committee is busily preparing interviews for all the candidates who are interested in working with our shul.

Third, our Sunshine Committee, chaired by Jennifer, is organized to visit those members confined to their homes or a facility. If you know of anyone who needs a visit, a card or a meal, the Sunshine Committee is ready.

Fourth, our Religious School is having a great year under the leadership of our School Director, David, and the Religious School committee chaired by Wendy. It is truly wonderful to see all the students, parents and teachers engaged in and enjoying Jewish education.

Fifth, our B'nai Mitzvah class is planning their special days. I am confident that, under Kate's tutorage, they will be well prepared and will give us reason to "kvell."

Sixth, our Fundraising Committee has already set August 21 and 22 as the dates for our "Fourth Annual BAJC Israeli Film & Food Festival." Movies are being screened, menus being developed and ads solicited to make yet another successful fundraiser for BAJC.

Seventh, the beautiful tree of life donated by the Greenblott family has been installed and leaves are starting to sell. For \$250 each, you can mark a celebration or honor someone with an engraved leaf, and all the monies will go to our building fund.

Eighth, Judy and Bobbe are coordinating volunteers from BAJC to help serve both the Morningside Shelter and the Overflow Shelter at the Baptist Church. Sadly, the numbers in need of shelter and food have risen, which makes this mitzvah project so important.

Ninth, upcoming Holiday celebrations are being planned. For Purim (Sunday afternoon, February 28<sup>th</sup> at 3:00), we will try to do a Purim *shpiel*. Watch for the audition call later this month. Passover Yiskor will occur on Monday, April 5 at 6:00. We will celebrate Yom Hazikaron and Yom

Ha'atzma'ut on Friday, April 23 with a service and a potluck oneg of Israeli food.

Over the next few months we will have our challenges. Over a dozen "members" have still not submitted their membership commitment forms and we can't really count them as members until they do. We are still looking for volunteers to serve on our Building and Grounds, Ritual, and Adult Education committees. And, given the state of our economy, we need to find ways to augment our congregational income.

This month, we begin to read the second book of Torah, Exodus. We will interpret the dramatic image of the bush that burns but is not consumed. On the one hand, we might dismiss it as an unrealistic and thus irrational 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. Seeing is believing if we choose to notice and acknowledge what we see.

B'shalom,  
Marty



## RABBI SEARCH REPORT

The Rabbi Search Committee has completed a lively series of open-house meetings and conversations with members of our congregation and has expressed its appreciation of the views and opinions you have shared about the qualities and experiences you think are important in a rabbi for our congregation. The committee has registered our opening for a rabbi with the Union for Reform Judaism and has begun receiving applications from Reform rabbis. They have also received applications from some candidates not affiliated with URJ. Paul, chair of the rabbi search committee, along with committee members Enid, Julie, Marty, Michael, and Louisa will be reviewing applications and resumes to prepare for the next step, which will involve informal and formal interviews. The committee will keep us informed with reports as its work progresses. It is not too late to contact any of the committee members or to e-mail [search@bajcvermont.org](mailto:search@bajcvermont.org) to express your opinions.

## COMMITTEES – WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE?

If you've read the last few newsletters, you are aware of the need for more people to become involved in the work of BAJC. Almost all our committees have openings for members. Some committees are not functioning because they are member-less and leader-less at this time. Perhaps if you know who chairs a committee, what it does, and when it meets, you will be inspired to join. Contact the chair directly to volunteer or to get more information, or contact Marty or Faith. These are committees that are open to new members at this time:

**Education** - recommends policy and reviews the activities of the school and oversees its operation; chaired by Wendy; meets one Sunday morning a month from ten o'clock to noon. The next meeting date is January 24<sup>th</sup>. Members of this committee are encouraged to be at the shul on Hebrew school Mondays whenever possible.

**Building & Grounds** - supervises the buildings, grounds, equipment and facilities for interior, garden, and outdoor spaces. This committee needs a chair and members. Contact Jackie for the garden sub-committee, Marty for maintenance and repair, Faith for interior care.

**Social Action** - analyzes the public affairs issues relating to Judaism that face the community; educates, sensitizes, and recommends positions to the congregation; operates synagogue social action programs; chaired by Judy, will meet when most convenient to the members.

**Fundraising** - oversees fundraising projects in support of operational expenses; chaired by Susan; usually meets on a Sunday afternoon every other month, more often when working on a project or event.

**Membership** - recruits, integrates, and works to retain members; coordinates with other committees to make connections between members and create opportunities for involvement; chaired by Sandy; meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 5:30

**Ritual** – works with the spiritual leader (when we have one) to support the congregational worship experience and to establish policies and practices regarding worship; this year this committee is responsible for arranging leadership for Shabbat services and holiday celebrations; it needs a new chairperson and new members, so the meeting day/time (currently the first Tuesday of the month at 5:30) may change to accommodate new members.

**Sunshine** - provides help and support for congregants facing illness and other crises; makes phone calls and visits, sends cards and notes, arranges rides to synagogue events when needed, and helps folks in need. Jennifer, the new chair, welcomes volunteers willing to take a little time to see to the good and welfare of our members, particularly those who are alone or house-bound.

**Hospitality** — this is a new committee that would be responsible for greeting and welcoming visitors and new people to services and other synagogue events, for serving light refreshments (oneg or kiddush) at services, and for coordinating potluck hosts.

**Adult Education** – currently there is no chair and no committee! Don't let this popular and much-needed program disappear!



## JANUARY CALENDAR

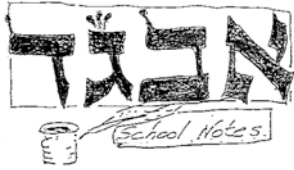
This month there are regular Shabbat services on two Saturday mornings at 10:00 and two Kabbalat Shabbat services on Friday nights at 7:30. The Saturday service on January 2<sup>nd</sup> will be led by Kate; the service on January 16<sup>th</sup> by Bob. The Friday night service on January 8<sup>th</sup> will be led by Marty and will be followed by a dessert potluck; the service on January 22<sup>nd</sup> will be led by Kate. There is Torah study on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10:00, yoga on the 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30, and mah jongg every Wednesday from 1:30 to 5:30.

## SJBC

The Significant Jewish Books Club is reading Ursula Bacon's *Shanghai Diary* (A Young Girl's Journey from Hitler's Hate to War-Torn China). The group will meet for potluck supper and book discussion on Wednesday evening, February 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30. Readers are welcome to join at any time.

## SNOWSHOES REPLACE HIKING BOOTS

Please contact Sheila with suggestions for locations and trails where the Outdoor Activities Club can go for snowshoeing and/or cross-country skiing. Sheila would like to coordinate regular (or irregular?) winter get-togethers for snowshoeing and/or cross-country skiing at locations that don't require trail fees. Perhaps hardy young-at-heart outdoor-type folks would also like to consider tubing, sledding, and tobogganing? Winter is a long season here in Vermont...may as well get out and enjoy it!



Dear Friends,

I've been considering the relationship of diversity and unity this year at the Hebrew School. One part that I love about Shir Heharim is our diversity. Being Jewish does not mean the same thing for all of us. Our community is made up of Jews who call themselves Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, traditional, neo-Hasidic, Renewal, Buddhist, Wiccan, Shamanistic, and several Jew-nitarians to boot. This is the Jewish world that our Hebrew School students will enter--a world where "not being Jewish enough" (Oy- how I have grappled with this as I find my path) is replaced with the deeply American values of respect for differences. How does it shape the ways in which we share our pride and joy in being Jewish?

The more I learn, the more I realize that indeed, Jewish life has always been very diverse. Being Jewish in 1700 Poland, was very different from being Jewish in 1700, post-renaissance Italy, where the rabbis were known to have taught dance and poetry and bare-breasted women appeared in Judaic art. Or 1200 Spain, where the Zohar (Judaism's main mystical text, an imaginative commentary on the Torah that shares deep secrets of the human experience coded inside lush imagery) was written.. Daniel Matt, the pre-eminent scholar and current translator of the Zohar's thousands of pages, describes the Zohar as "a proto-novel of sacred fantasy with the Shechina, the Goddess as the main character". Wow! How about 1100 Kaifeng China, where Jews built a synagogue and described halacha as "the Dao". Baghdad in 800? The Jews were welcomed teachers in the new Islamic community and a commonly-used name for G-d in the Jewish community was Allah.

You get the idea? This just scratches the surface. Two wonderful books of history that share this new understanding of our diverse history are *The Cultures of the Jews*, edited by David Biale, and *Judaism in Practice from 600-1800*. Leading scholars take different chapters from ancient days to current days in the first book. The second book has shorter chapters, arranged by topic, and features wonderful primary sources (a good preview exists on Google Books). My favorite is an Egyptian woman from the mid-1300's who writes a letter for help to the head of the community

(Maimonides' son) because her husband is spending too much time at the Sufi Monastery. She worried that her husband's devotional practices at the monastery, while worthy, are taking him away from the synagogue where he should be praying three times every day! And, she was worried he might want to move the family to the monastery community, which would prohibit her son's attendance at the Hebrew day school!

I would like to open for us all this question of our community's diversity. What parts of the great landscape that is "Jewish Identity" and "Spiritual Life" do you love best? Where do you find your nourishment? Can you think of one additional way to communicate this directly with those you love? At school, we are providing our kids with the basics of holidays, Hebrew language, and Torah stories. Our hope is that, with these solid landmarks, they will be able to explore Judaism on the trail and off the trail in an infinite number of ways as they grow and deepen in their spiritual and religious lives, knowing that in our diversity we unify together.

Now, here are a few highlights from a busy month of Hebrew school:

Our Open House on Nov 30 was attended by a minyan of parents, all of whom were able to sit in on their children's classes and to hear about the activities of the school and the education committee. This winter, the education committee will work with the teachers to create a sequential curriculum that is filled with best practices and creative assessments. The committee is looking for members, or you might consider being on a sub-committee to work specifically on formalizing a sequential Hebrew language curriculum .

Our Chanukah miracle on Dec. 14 was platters of delicious latkes appearing as if by magic for our school celebration. We lit the menorah together, sang a few songs, ate delicious latkes and sufganyot (doughnut holes), and enjoyed some high-stakes dreidle. Fun, Fun Fun.

As of this writing, I'm preparing for a whole-school program celebrating Shabbat...even though it is on a Monday. We will begin with a game that introduces prayer, and then meet at the table for blessings for candle-lighting, Kiddush, challah, followed by lots of songs, stories and teachings. This will be our send-off as we head towards the secular New Year. May 2010 bring blessings to our school and to all of Congregation Shir Heharim.

I look forward to your comments and questions at [school@bajcvermont.com](mailto:school@bajcvermont.com).

B'shalom,  
David

## 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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