

CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

February 2010

Shevat / Adar 5770

BENNINGTON'S CONGREGATION BETH EL CELEBRATES ITS CENTENNIAL

Here are some of the words the President of Congregation Beth El in Bennington, delivered at the re-dedication ceremony celebrating one hundred years of Judaism in the Bennington community. He first talked about how we lose our sense of adventure and how our imaginations are constrained, as we get older, and then he went on to say:

To this, a synagogue provides a rebuke. A synagogue—our synagogue—is many things. It is a house of prayer, a place for celebrations, a home for study, for yoga and music—even an international house of latkes. And it is a place where we are reminded that we are all still explorers, surveying not the wandering rivers of distant continents but the obscure paths of the human soul. Judaism offers us a kind of map of the world, however frayed and murky and hard to decipher. Some paths may move in directions we no longer care to follow, but still it is a map of who and what we are. In Maimonides' indelible phrase, it is "a guide for the perplexed." Here we learn that we do not take this journey alone. We draw strength from the memory of the past and the promise of the future...Tradition is not just what we do—it is who we are. A synagogue is many things, but it is most of all US—a congregation, a people. Each of us is like a single letter of the Torah—by itself a mere scribble without meaning, but together we form a story, a song.

And here are the closing words of Rabbi Joshua Boettiger's talk at the rededication:

We come here this evening to renew our commitments to this community, to Judaism in this part of the world, to make it come to life in our lives and in our children's lives. Because it must come to life—it is not enough to say "let's keep it going for the sake of continuity or tradition." We need to be able to say "let's keep Judaism going because it is who we are, it is a path that brings us deeper into our lives and into the lives of the world, it is a path that is real and speaks to who we are now and who we are becoming." This is the work of all of us, and it is holy work

BAJC is not yet one hundred years old, but we travel the same road and do the same holy work as Congregation Beth El. Their words should inspire us as we look back at our almost forty year past and ahead to our future as a vibrant Jewish community.

B'shalom,
Faith

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד: על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

Al sh'loshah d'varim haolam omed: Al haTorah, v'al ha-avodah, v'al g'milut chasadim.

The world depends on three things: on Torah, on worship and on loving deeds. - Pirkei Avot 1:2

I am writing this column as we learn more and more about the devastation in Haiti. Like many of you, I wanted to reach out to help Haiti victims. I decided on making a financial contribution to an organization that I researched and felt would put the philanthropic dollars to good use. For me, a disaster of this magnitude is difficult to comprehend and it definitely puts many of the issues and concerns that I have in perspective. It also makes me appreciate the blessings that are often overlooked.

According to Jewish tradition, blessings are the most basic form of prayer. Through blessings, Jews acknowledge the beauty and marvels of life. The last few columns I have written discussed the needs of our congregation, but I would like to use this month's column to mention just a few of the blessings I think we have received (in no particular order).

- We are blessed to have lay leaders who have volunteered to conduct services, giving us the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat. This month, we are planning a joint Purim celebration on February 28 at our shul with our friends at Congregation Ahavas Achim (additional details can be found in the newsletter).
- We are blessed to come together as a community when community is needed—when members need to say Kaddish, when meals are needed at the Overflow Shelters...and when our dear Faith broke her leg and was buoyed by an outpouring of calls, cards, e-mails and visits.
- We are blessed with enthusiastic students and committed teachers in our flourishing religious school. At a recent meeting of our b'nai mitzvah families, I heard plans for their joyous life cycle event but also plans for many mitzvah projects.
- Our rabbinic search committee is diligently working in a very thoughtful and respectful manner to identify our next spiritual leader..
- We are consistently offering Torah study twice a month and members are enjoying the blessing of studying Torah together

- We enjoyed the sweet blessing of dessert together following our Friday, January 8 Shabbat service and are looking forward to the next one, scheduled for February 12th.

I know there are more blessings we share and I would really like to hear about them from you. Please email me (marty@bajcvermont.org) with more BAJC blessings that I will be able to share in my column next month.

B'shalom,
Marty



SERVICES IN FEBRUARY

On Saturday morning at 10:00, the 6th, Bob will lead the service. On Friday evening, the 12th at 7:30, Kate will lead the Kabbalat Shabbat service, which will be followed by dessert potluck. Kate will also lead on Saturday morning the 20th at 10:00. Marty will lead the Friday night service on the 26th at 7:30, and also the Torah study on two Saturdays, the 13th and the 27th, at 10:00.

We will celebrate Purim on Sunday afternoon, February 28th at 3:00, with a service jointly led by Marty and Rabbi Sarah of Ahavas Achim, the Keene congregation. There will be a Purim shpiel, costumes, refreshments, and other merriment, with more details forthcoming in e-mails as the holiday approaches. The Purim shpiel is published on our website for your perusal; we are looking for volunteers to act (read) the various parts. Please let Marty know as soon as possible which part you would like. Another way you can get ready to welcome Adar and Purim is to prepare your best hamentaschen recipe for the potluck dessert to follow the Purim shpiel.

RABBI SEARCH COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Rabbi Search Committee, led by Paul, has recently conducted telephone interviews with rabbis who have submitted resumes and letters of application for the position of “thousand hour rabbi” (translation: half-time rabbi) at BAJC. Following up with the candidates of interest, the committee will be arranging in-person interviews and opportunities for candidates to conduct services for us. The committee hopes that BAJC members will attend these candidate-led services and provide feedback to the committee. Dates will be announced in the newsletter and/or e-mail communications, depending on available lead time. The committee hopes that these services will occur during March, so keep your Shabbat calendar open.

MITZVAH MUSIC

BAJC’s social action committee is planning a dance concert to benefit the overflow shelter and Morningside too. John and his band, Buddy Folly and the Experiments, will be rocking the room at the Baptist Church on Friday evening, February 12th from 7:30 to 11:00.

The committee would love some help with making and selling refreshments, taking donations at the door and most importantly, putting up flyers and getting the word out to folks so we get a really good turnout and raise a whole bunch of money for the shelters! If any one would like to help in any of these ways, please e-mail Judy or call her at home before 9:00 pm.

SUNSHINE COMMITTEE

The Sunshine Committee has been newly re-energized and is ready to care for, comfort and celebrate with our members. If you yourself are ill, have just had a new baby or other simchas in your life, or if you know someone in those circumstances or even just someone who could use a bit of sunshine, please let Jennifer know. Committee members are Jennifer, Bobbe, Faith, Felicia, and Andi. The committee stands ready to send cards, make visits, help with meals and other needs, and will also arrange rides to services and other BAJC events if you give them a little advance notice.

SJBC

The Significant Jewish Books Club will meet at 6:30 on Wednesday, February 10th to discuss *Shanghai Diary* by Ursula Bacon, to select a book for the April meeting and, of course, to enjoy a potluck supper. Newcomers are always welcome to join SJBC, even if it’s only for one particular book.

LIBRARY AT LAST

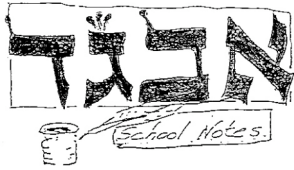
A number of people worked many hours through the summer and fall to unpack, sort, shlep, organize, and catalogue carton after carton after carton of books that have been in BAJC storage for years. Thanks to the efforts of Deb and her daughters, Sheila, Eugene, and Faith and Abe, under the leadership and direction (and shlepping) of Claudia and Carol, the BAJC library will be open by the end of this month or the beginning of March. There are more than 800 books available for circulation, including novels, poetry, folktales, and other fiction; holocaust studies; kabbalah, mysticism, spirituality, and philosophy; biblical texts, commentary, and comparative religion; children’s and young adult literature; feminism; Israel; life cycles and holidays—and more. Books can be signed out from the BAJC office/library on Monday or Wednesday afternoons, by appointment, or at random times when the shul is open.

In addition to books available for circulation, there are bargain books in the barn which you can buy for ten cents a book or \$1 for a bag of books. Also, there are two sets of the Jewish Encyclopedia for sale for a reasonable donation, and there are copies of *Gates of Prayer* (our old siddur) which you can have for the asking.

ONGOING FUNDRAISING

Don’t let the snows of winter bury your deposit bottles and cans and your used printer cartridges. You can leave them in the little shed to the right of the barn anytime. Also, please remember to GOODSEARCH instead of googling. Google won’t send BAJC any money, but if you search at www.goodsearch.com, with Brattleboro Area Jewish Community listed as your charity, we’ll get a penny for every click—and you’ll readily get the information you need.

The Tree of Life has only 95 leaves left to be engraved (\$250 each) to memorialize a loved one or to celebrate a simcha. Each leaf can have up to four lines of engraving, and all the money goes into the BAJC building fund.



Dear Friends,

Our Hebrew school had to say a sad farewell this month to Mara, who submitted her resignation from the school. Mara's inspired teaching has been a gift to us over the years, including the past two years when she volunteered as school director. Her enthusiasm and spirit will certainly be missed, but we understand that Mara probably will not miss the long drive down from Chester each week.

What to do when a teacher decides to leave in the middle of the year? Not a problem this year, because we were lucky enough to have a talented "understudy" ready to step into the star's role without missing a line. Rachel, a newcomer to the area, joined the Hebrew school staff several weeks ago as an aide in Kate's b'nai mitzvah class. Rachel is an experienced Hebrew school teacher, well-qualified to take over Mara's class in a seamless transition. She grew up in Israel, is the daughter of Middlebury's Hillel rabbi, has taught Hebrew school classes and has tutored b'nai mitzvah students in Middlebury. Not the least of her qualification is that she is a professional acrobat! acrobat!

Jackie's class has been studying shabbat and bible stories. Hebrew language studies have taught the *yeladim* to write and recognize the letters in the word "*baruch*," so important in our prayers. The class made beautiful Shabbat candleholders from "tag sale" cordial glasses which they decorated with sequins and beads, ready to use at home to welcome Shabbat. The class invites you to come see the angels they made to place on a golden ladder in the classroom, illustrating the story of Jacob's journey where he wrestles with an "angel" (perhaps God?), one of the bible stories they have been studying..

Judith enjoyed "subbing" in David's class recently, where they were studying about kibbutz life and discussing whether they would like to live in a kibbutz. One strong objection to kibbutz life was: "No! Everyone should have their own things!" but several students said they'd like to try it if their mom and dad were there too. Most were shocked at the idea of all the children living together in one house, separate from their parents, but they were glad to learn that most kibbutzim these days have done away with the "children's houses." They did, however, support the idea of kids living together if

they wanted to when they were teens. (Parents of teenagers might agree that this is a good idea!)

B'shalom,
Faith (subbing for Director David)



RENEWAL IN ISRAEL

BAJC is invited to join a 10-day trip in the summer of 2010 designed especially for ALEPH members and friends. It will be led by ALEPH leaders: second generation

Jewish Renewalist, aspiring cantor and martial artist Sarah Beck-Berman, and ALEPH Rabbinic Student, chant leader, environmental activist and spiritual storyteller Ilan Glazer. The dates of the trip will be finalized soon.

Music, creative ritual, joy and deep learning will infiltrate every aspect of the tour. You will pray and learn with Israeli Jewish Renewal teachers and peacemakers, experience an ecstatic welcome of Shabbat and dive into the mystical energy of Sfat. Expect chanting, drumming and niggunim on the bus, meaningful rituals at holy sites like the Kotel, sunrise prayers at Masada and more. You will float in the Dead Sea, participate in a traditional Bedouin feast and tour Jerusalem more extensively than almost any other Birthright trip. Israel There is an active outdoor focus on the agenda, including kayaking, water activities, hiking, and dancing.

RENEWAL IN ISRAEL is truly a once in a life-time opportunity. A participant on a previous trip said: "I secretly hoped I would encounter at least one life-altering moment that would bring me back to my heritage. I was not prepared to be having these experiences on a daily basis. We were offered prayer and meditation services every morning, tons of exercise during the day, wonderful leaders, new friends. Although there were so many amazing and memorable moments on this trip, the most meaningful aspect of my experience has been finding a sense of belonging with the Jewish people for the FIRST time in my entire life."

If you or someone you know is Jewish, 18-26, has graduated from high school and has not been on an organized trip to Israel, let ALEPH know of your interest by filling out a form at: <https://www.aleph.org/israeltrips.htm>. Then, you must register directly with Israel Outdoors at www.israeloutdoors.com for the ALEPH Jewish Renewal trip. (Look in the drop down menu.) Register as close to 2/17 as you can!

.....

HELP THE VICTIMS OF THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

A severe earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010.

This is the most severe earthquake to hit that impoverished country in 200 years. The death toll is expected to reach hundreds of thousands with millions left homeless, and it will likely be many days until the impact is fully known. The epicenter was near the capital of Port-au-Prince.

As in the past, the Reform Jewish community has a long history of generosity when natural disasters devastate communities around the world. Your generosity at this critical time enables us to play a role in recovery efforts and to bring healing and hope to those whose lives have been affected.

Donations to the Union of Reform Judaism Haiti Relief Fund can be made online (www.urj.org) or by check (note: Haiti Relief in the memo section) to:

Union for Reform Judaism
Attention: Development
633 Third Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Note: The Union for Reform Judaism retains no overhead expenses for disaster relief donations, other than direct costs such as credit card fees.

.....

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

Board of Trustees:

Wendy Bayliss
Paul Berch
Sandra Brodsky
Martin Cohn
Stuart Copans
Vikki Dunn
Sharon Myers
Faith and Abe Schuster
Julie Strothman
Randy Terk
Jeff Teitel

Officers:

President: : Martin Cohn
Vice-president Julie Strothman
Treasurer: Randy Terk
Secretary: Stuart Copans
Immediate Past President: Paul Berch

e-mail: info@bajcvermont.org
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:
marty@bajcvermont.org
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 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.)