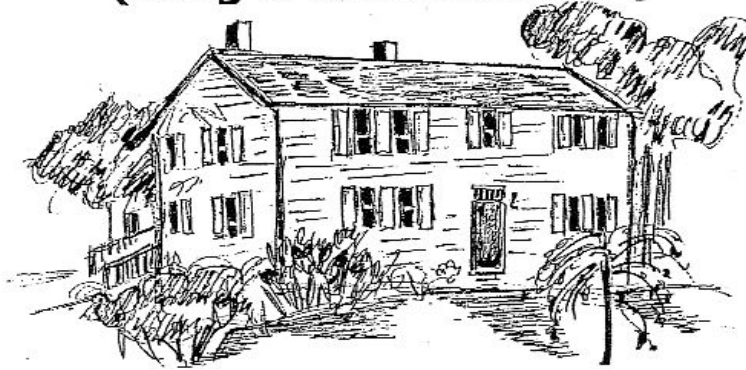


CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

June 2011

Iyar / Sivan 5771

FROM THE RABBI

WHEN THE ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY

About twenty-five years ago, when I was living in San Francisco, I became reacquainted with a childhood friend whom I hadn't seen since grade school. Laurie had become an artist at a time when I was still unsure about my own direction in life. Admiring the passion she had for her art, I shared with her the fact that I too was thinking about becoming an artist—which was true at the time. She replied by saying, "Tom, you don't *think* about *becoming* an artist. It's something you just *are*. You become an artist because can't *be* anything else."

Laurie's comment stayed with me for a long time. Although I never became an artist, it inspired me to be true to my authentic self. I spent a decade studying Vedanta and Buddhism and I was struggling to incorporate those spiritual teachings into my daily life when I met a young rabbi, David J. Meyer, who introduced me to Jewish spirituality in a way that resonated with what I had learned in the ashram. Contrary to my earlier impressions, I found that Judaism possessed at its core a seamlessly-integrated set of spiritual teachings as profound as anything I had encountered through Eastern traditions. Consequently, I saw in Judaism an opportunity to become fully engaged in a spiritual practice that embraced every aspect of my life; even the all-too-ordinary aspects and relationships I had previously dismissed as irrelevant, if not annoying. Because I took spirituality seriously, I decided then to take Judaism seriously. Until then, being Jewish was nothing

more to me than an incidental ethnic identity but, at this new juncture in my life, I was ready to immerse myself in study and practice, not as a hobby but as my primary vocation – as a rabbi. I felt I couldn't do or be anything else.

Twenty years later, I realize it's taken me a while to bring my life, relationships and spiritual aspirations into alignment; it's always a work in progress. At least I now feel fully-engaged in a tradition and community that understands and embraces the interdependence of body and soul. Jewish tradition recognizes, for example, that social justice and environmental concerns are not separate from spiritual concerns. In other words, changing the world necessarily involves changing one's relationship with the world and, on a deeper level, with what we call God. In this way, 'being Jewish' becomes a way of embodying a vision that is both transcendent and all-encompassing.

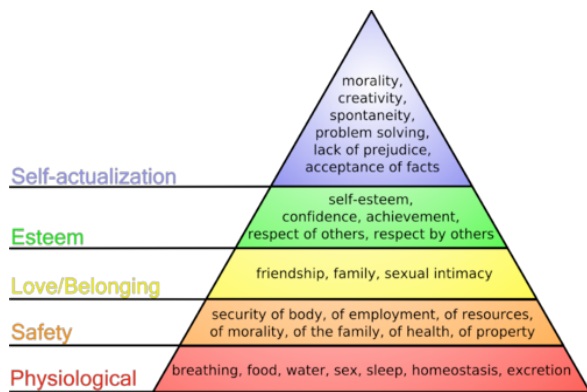
I am reminded here of a story from the Talmud (from Tractate *Sanhedrin*, 91b): Once there was a king who had a magnificent orchard full of the most delectable figs. Knowing that even his most trusted servants could not resist the temptation, he hired two servants whom he thought would be unable to steal his precious fruit - one who was blind and another who was unable to walk. One day, the lame man said to the blind man, "These are truly beautiful figs. Why don't you put me on your shoulders and I will direct you so that we can pick figs to enjoy." And that is just what they did. Later, when the king asked them where his figs had gone, the lame man said, "I couldn't have taken them. I can't even walk," and the blind man said, "I can't see. How could I have possibly taken the figs?"

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FROM THE RABBI

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

The original intent of this story was to illustrate rabbinic notions about a final Judgment Day when body and soul will be judged together. I'm not sure how relevant their point is here, but I do find the allegory of the two men compelling for another reason.



To explain it in a more contemporary framework, it's like Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" (see photo). It is only after a person's basic needs are fulfilled that he or she can attend to higher needs – like belongingness, self-esteem, and, ultimately, self-actualization. And, as I found through my own experience, fulfilling these higher needs can only be done through the skillful integration of physicality and spirituality. This is not an easy task, especially in relationship with others. Yet it is precisely in relationship with others, in the context of a community that is not self-isolating, that the most enduring self-actualization can be achieved.

For me, being part of a Jewish community means bringing together people who are intensely pragmatic with artistic, visionary types who are passionate about spirituality. Together we can enjoy the extraordinary sweetness that such cooperation brings within reach. Once you develop a taste for this sweetness, you realize there's a higher purpose for even the most ordinary tasks involved in being part of a Jewish community, whether it's setting up chairs for a service or preparing dessert for a potluck meal. Before our "T'Orah Tuesday" morning yoga and *shacharit* (morning prayer service) at BAJC, it's my job to sweep the floors. One could say it's a very Zen-like activity. For me, there's nothing I'd rather be doing.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Tom

CONNECTING WITH ISRAEL IN BRATTLEBORO



Close to seventy people attended a Middle-East Forum sponsored by BAJC on Monday, May 9th at Centre

Congregational Church. In a program titled "How Does the Media Shape Our Understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" peace-activist Noa Milman facilitated an interactive program that explored multiple perspectives and approaches to the conflict. The event was co-sponsored by The Brattleboro Area Interfaith Clergy Association, All Souls Church Unitarian Universalist, Centre Congregational Church, First Baptist Church of Brattleboro, First Congregational Church of West Brattleboro, United Church of Christ, the Conflict Transformation Department of the SIT Graduate Institute, the Brattleboro Area Interfaith Initiative, and the Consulate General of Israel to New England. The well-structured Forum was, in the words of Rabbi Tom, "challenging and, in some ways, painful...but it was an important step in our efforts to restart the conversation." The support and cooperation of so many local faith-based groups is a good start toward better understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to educated consideration of ways in which it might be resolved. Plans are already underway for a follow-up event that will give the Brattleboro area another chance to practice compassionate listening in a way that can bring healing to our community.

On the next Monday, Ore Ayah Dagan, the Israeli emissary (*shalicha*) to the Jewish Federation of New Hampshire, spoke about life in Israel to a group of about 60 students at Brattleboro Union High School. Then Ore came to our Hebrew school and delighted our students with an interactive talk that included a huge puzzle floor-map of Israel, pictures of her family and home, and answers to the great questions the kids asked about what it's like to grow up in Israel, serving in the army, etc. Ore joined the classes singing Israeli folk songs, closing with "Hatikvah." After the students left, Ore met with a group of adults and narrated a computer program about Israel, speaking about life there from a non-political standpoint. After a lively question-and-answer session, we continued to chat over coffee and tasty middle-eastern desserts and snacks. Her visit gave kids and adults in our community a positive impression of Israel and Israelis. Ore will be the *shalicha* in this area again next year; so we hope she will come to Brattleboro again to give the many who missed this event an opportunity to meet her and hear about her experiences growing up in Israel.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Three years ago, looking at the responsibility for writing thirty articles for the BAJC newsletter seemed daunting, but I was able to do it and now it's hard to believe that this will be the last time I write an article as President.

I'd like to begin my last article by dispelling a very common myth. Over the past three years, many people have told me that being a synagogue president is a thankless task. Nothing could be further from the truth! I can't speak for all synagogue presidents but, for me, being President of BAJC has been a very rewarding experience. It has given me the opportunity to meet new people, make new friends, participate in many events, and enjoy both up-front and behind-the-scenes activities. The breadth and depth of what we do continue to amaze me. I hope many of you will aspire to a leadership position so you too can have this satisfying experience.

I have come to realize that we actually take for granted much of what we do. When a Jew in our community needs to be buried, our Chevra Kaddisha is there to carry out the ancient Jewish traditions. When a member is recuperating from an accident or illness, our BAJC Cares committee responds with notes, calls, meals and visits. Various folks work to take care of our building and to provide all kinds of services and opportunities to our members. Many good things happen because we have dedicated volunteers who "just say YES" when a need arises.

תודה רבה
Thank You

I could not have done my job without the support of our Board of Trustees, Rabbi Heyn and, of course, my understanding and supportive family. I especially want to thank Julie, who set a new standard for Vice President. I was also blessed to have the advice and support of Paul, our wise I.P.P. (immediate past president). Julie, Paul, and the Board were incredibly generous with their time, good counsel, and support.

Along with responsibilities, being President also has many rewards. I have had the opportunity to meet with many of our members to discuss the future of our congregation. I have watched as we celebrate Jewish holidays and develop interesting educational and social programs. I marvel as our community responds to the needs not only of our congregation, but also of the community at large.

One of the best parts of the job is receiving compliments about our congregation. I can't tell you how many people – congregants, new members, visitors - have told me what a warm and welcoming place this is, what wonderful Torah readers we have, how beautiful our building is, how much our Hebrew school accomplishes, how meaningful our services are. I am grateful to those of you who called, sent an e-mail, or came over to me to thank me for my efforts on behalf of the congregation.

While the job of President is rewarding, I admit it is not always easy. There were times I was awake at three in the morning worrying about BAJC. There were times after a long work day when I felt like I just couldn't respond to one more e-mail. I often wished I had the wisdom of Solomon to guide me when there were difficult decisions to make. I tried my best to listen, to keep an open mind, to look for creative solutions, to be supportive. I always tried to put the good of the whole ahead of the desires of a few. I hope I lived up to your expectations.

In order for us to create a vibrant future, we must build on our strengths. In fact, we have quite a lot of strengths upon which to build. Here is my one last request as President of BAJC: remember to see the best in your fellow congregants, in our clergy, in our teachers and in every volunteer who works so hard to make Congregation Shir Heharim the special place it is. May we continue to learn together, pray together, and care for each other as we work to create an enduring Jewish community in southeast Vermont. Thank you for the honor of being President

L'shalom,
Marty Cohn

BOOKS AND TILES

The Significant Jewish Books Club welcomes new "regular" members or people who want to participate for a particular book, at any time. We meet at the shul one weeknight every six weeks or so for potluck supper, discussion of a book we've all read, and selection of the next book. The books and the meeting dates are usually listed in this newsletter, but you can also get information by calling Esther.

The Mah Jongg Mavens meet on Wednesday afternoons at the shul and welcome new folks to join any time, whether experienced players or people who would like to learn. If there are enough people who would like to start a game in the evening, that can be arranged. Contact Faith (faith@bajcvermont.org or 802-257-1959) for more information. P.S. You don't have to be Jewish to play mah jongg!



JUNE CALENDAR

We are blessed this month to have two Saturday morning services that celebrate bat mitzvahs—Susanna’s on the 4th and Claire’s on the 18th. Both services are at the West Village Meeting House, starting promptly at 10:00. All are invited to come and welcome these two lovely young ladies as adult members of our congregation.

Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat services will take place at our shul on the 10th and the 24th. Both start at 7:00 and both are followed by a dessert potluck. On the 24th we will have a special guest, Rabbi Dov Taylor from Congregation Shir Shalom in Woodstock, VT. Rabbi Taylor, an inspiring teacher and a distinguished scholar, will give a talk entitled "Four Anniversaries: What is a Reform Jew Today?"

At 7:00 on Wednesday, the 15th, Marty Cohn will lead a Torah study; the portion is *Sh'lach L'cha*, (Numbers 13:1-15:41). The yoga and prayer service that used to be called "Wake-up Wednesday" or "Morning Minyan" has moved to Tuesdays and is now called "T'Orah Tuesday" (T'Orah" meaning "illumination"). It still begins at 8:00 a.m. with yoga and meditation, followed by shacharit (the morning prayer service), and it ends promptly at 9:00. On Wednesday evening, June 1st, Rabbi Tom will lead the fourth and final "Jewish Journeys" discussion, which you can attend even if you missed the other sessions.

On Wednesday, June 8th, we will celebrate Shavuot, the holiday that commemorates the day God gave the Torah to the entire Israelite nation assembled at Mount Sinai. We will begin with a service at 6:00, followed by a potluck supper, then a Yizkor service at 7:30. The food tradition for Shavuot is dairy, so bring a dairy dish to share (perhaps blintzes, pirogi, kugel?) and a delicious dairy dessert (perhaps cheesecake?). The Yizkor service at 7:30 is the last of the four Yizkors in our Jewish year. Yizkor gives us the opportunity to honor cherished family and friends whose lives were a gift to us and whose memories comfort and sustain us to this day.

Saturday, June 11th is a very special date for our congregation. We will gather for Havdallah, then go on to celebrate the consecration of our rabbi, Tom Heyn with music, speakers, and dessert. The activities will be conducted under a tent on our west lawn, ending with a celebratory dessert potluck. (It's not too late to contact Sharon to let her know what you will bring, or to ask her what is needed.

This is an "organized potluck," which we hope will result in a spectacular, varied, beautiful display of delicious desserts.)

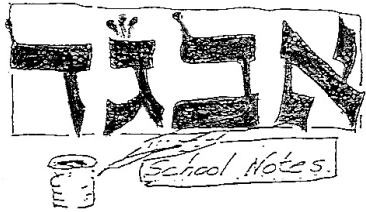
BAJC's annual membership meeting will take place at 6:30 on Monday evening, June 27th, preceded by a barbeque supper at 5:00. We will supply hot dogs, hamburgers, rolls, condiments, and drinks. Salads and desserts will be potluck. Please RSVP if you are coming for the cookout so we will know how much food we need. We will adjourn to the membership meeting at 7:30, where the agenda will include a state-of-the-shul report, a budget presentation, and election of new Trustees.

The following resolution was passed unanimously by the BAJC Board of Trustees at its April meeting.

Israel's Independence Day (Yom Ha'atzmaut) commemorates the declaration of independence of Israel in 1948, celebrating the declaration of the state of Israel by David Ben-Gurion in Tel Aviv on May 14, 1948, and the end of the British Mandate of Palestine. To honor this historic event in the history of the Jewish people, Brattleboro Area Jewish Community resolves to express our unconditional support for the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish State and opposes all actions and efforts to delegitimize and demonize the existence of the State of Israel.

Julie and Stuart
invite all to join BAJC
at the West Village Meeting House
on Saturday morning
June 4th at 10:00a.m.
as their daughter
Susanna
becomes a Bat Mitzvah.

There will be an oneg immediately
following the service.



June 6th will be the last Hebrew school day for the year. Parents are invited to attend for closing ceremonies, any time after 4:30. Here are a few end-of-the-year notes about what's been going on in our Hebrew school.

Judith loved working one-on-one with the students this year, evaluating how adept students were at decoding, finding out which letters and sounds were “friends” and which ones had to be learned or relearned. Learning to read Hebrew is not easy! Students have to learn to make sounds that do not exist in English. They also have to learn to distinguish letters that look similar but sound different, letters that sound similar but look different, and final letter forms, where the sound of a letter has a different shape when it comes at the end of the word! Judith gives all the students an A+ for the tremendous effort to learn to speak, write, and read this language that is utterly different in shape and sound from anything they see and hear in the normal course of their days.

David's Dalet class of 11 students worked hard to reach the goal of being ready for the b'nai mitzvah class next year. David, along with Diane as co-teacher in Hebrew and Judith assisting when needed, worked to close the gap between the different levels of Hebrew literacy in the class. Although this is still a work in progress, Dalet students know so much more now than they did in September. They learned the prayers that are essential for weekday, Shabbat, and Torah services. Although many of the students will need extra help in Hebrew to learn their haftorah and to be able to read the Torah, they have the fundamentals to accomplish this. In the history and culture part of class, they concentrated on Jewish history before the 20th century, looking at the lives, politics, and beliefs of early European Jews and learning how being Ashkenazi or Sephardic determined where they lived, what they ate, how they prayed, and how they were persecuted for their Jewish beliefs. Celebrating the Jewish holidays throughout the year gave the class the opportunity to explore what it means to be a Jew in rural Vermont. David feels that the Dalet students will enter the b'nai mitzvah class with a strong Jewish identity!

Karen feels sad saying goodbye to the aleph class, where she and her students had a lot of fun with Jewish games, stories, and songs. They gained a better understanding of Jewish holidays through stories and various projects, such as the baby Moses in baskets, which they made during Passover and the festive masks they made to celebrate Purim. Her students, Aden, Avi, Lily, Musi, Merou, Robert, and Zekey learned about the importance of tzedakah and they know quite a few Hebrew letters. Karen hopes they will practice them every so often over the summer so they will remember them in the fall and be ready to move on to new letters.

Jackie's bet class focused on the prophets, learning lessons about the information words carry, about fearlessness and imperfection, about optimism and belief, about miracles and the lessons we learn from them. The class came to understand that the prophets were not always honored or welcomed by ordinary people, often living on the fringe of society because their words were not cheerful and they constantly warned people not to stray from the paths of righteousness and not to disobey God's commandments. The class wondered whether anyone could be a prophet and had they perhaps met any prophets, and they considered the price of speaking up. All of the students participated in discussions, sharing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, and making great strides in learning about Jewish beliefs as well as in Hebrew language study.

Chelsa's gimmel class spent a lot of time playing games to reinforce recognition of Hebrew letters and reading words. They learned the blessings and customs for welcoming Shabbat and celebrated all the holidays. For Sukkot, they learned the prayers and led the congregation in the shaking of the lulav and etrog, On Chanukah, they performed a play for the school and parents and they held a seder for Tu b'shevat. They heard stories, learned songs, and developed a positive connection to Jewish learning and Judaism.

The **education committee** has discussed several options for accommodating all youngsters who want to attend our Hebrew school in the fall. They are considering occupancy limitations, available space, and BAJC's goal—not to turn any student away. The committee will be meeting with parents of Hebrew school students to discuss the possibilities for structuring the school in the year ahead.



THE ISRAELI FILM FESTIVAL

FIFTH ANNUAL ISRAELI FILM AND FOOD FESTIVAL

BAJC is planning its fifth annual Israeli Film and Food Festival, a summer fun(d)raiser that will take place on

Sunday afternoon, August 21st at the Mountain Park Cinema in West Dover and Saturday evening, August 27th at the New England Youth Theater in Brattleboro.

We are preparing a program booklet that will include information about BAJC, reviews of the four films, Israeli content, and, of course, advertising. We urge our members and friends to purchase ads to publicize their businesses and services or, if you do not have a business or service to advertise, buy a personal ad- even a one-line patron ad--to express your support for BAJC or to honor a special person or a special event. Even if you cannot attend either film showing, we hope you will support our effort with ads or a donation. Another way you could help is to solicit ads from businesses and services where you have a personal connection—for example, your beauty shop, service station, dentist, doctor, therapist, accountant, lawn care service, restaurants you frequent, etc. (Talk to Susan or Faith about doing that.) Ticket purchased at the door will be \$25, but tickets in advance are just \$18 for each date. You can purchase tickets to both events, or to either one, by sending an order form and check to BAJC.

The BAJC Board of Trustees and the fundraising committee thank you in advance for your support.

REFUAH SHLEMA

Although respect for people's privacy prevents us from mentioning names of people who are ill or troubled, there are a number of members and friends at this time for whom we are saying prayers for healing. May their health be restored, their strength revived, their spirit renewed, and may they be rescued from trouble, distress, and illness.



TIKKUN OLAM

On April 12th the final dinner for the season was served at the Overflow Shelter. Working with our congregants and other members of our community to plan and deliver these meals is an honor for me, and I

thank everyone who has participated. The guests at the shelter enjoy it when we are there because of the interest we show each individual.

Because generous congregants have contributed money to the Overflow Shelter Fund throughout the year, we were also able to provide a full meal to the residents who were left homeless due to the fire at Brooks House. The Red Cross had all residents placed in temporary housing by the Friday after the fire, but many of those places did not have kitchen facilities. We were able to provide a full take-home meal for those in need for the weekend after the fire. I felt very proud to be representing BAJC and being able to answer the call for help during this crisis. Bobbe

Editor's note: We cannot say a big enough **THANK YOU** to Bobbe for her big heart and for the work she has done to provide food for our needy neighbors and to give BAJC members the opportunity for *tikkun olam*- helping heal the world right in our own neighborhood.

Robin and Marvin
invite you to join us as our daughter
Claire
is called to the Torah as a Bat Mitzvah.
Saturday June 18, 2011 at 10:00 a.m.
West Village Meeting House.
Oneg immediately following the service.

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 5771. 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.)