



BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

Welcome to the NEW Beth Chai Board

Continuity is the byword for Beth Chai's Board of Directors that was elected at the annual meeting on May 18.

David Elfin, Vice President during the past year, was elevated to President, switching roles with his predecessor, Andrew Strongin. We owe Andrew a tremendous debt for an amazing year during which he spearheaded the development of our improved website as well as the reworking of our Yom Kippur service which will be unveiled this fall. However, Andrew isn't off the hook just yet. The Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah and Kol Nidre services are beckoning, too!

Aside from David and Andrew, five board members are returning. They are: Howie Feinstein (Social Action), Marji Ross (Music), Shannon Rudisill (who moves from Community Building to Membership), Susan Stewart (School) and Julie Vigdor (Communications).

Ken Jacobson, who has been Programs Chair for many years, officially returns to the Board in that capacity. Sara Duke replaces the departing Deborah Signer Balaschak as Secretary with Joe Gitchell taking over for Pat Lovenhart as Treasurer and Daniel Korn assuming the new position of Volunteers Chair. *(Continued on page 3)*

Adult Education for June: Special Shavuot Program

June 8: Receiving Torah at Sinai – Its Meaning Then and Now. In a special program led by guest speaker Rabbi Leila Gal Berner, we will explore with the help of midrash what happened on Shavuot, the day on which the people Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. After looking at how events unfolded then, and what they might have meant and felt like to our ancestors, we will discuss the relevance that “receiving Torah” may have for members of Beth Chai

and for those who come after us. **Note:** Adult Ed will take place from 10:15 – 11 a.m. only. At 11:15, the adults will be joined by the Sunday School students and their teachers for an intergenerational tour guided by Rabbi Gal Berner of a Torah scroll, during which the scroll will be opened wide to allow examination of its calligraphy, craftsmanship, and artistry, as well as of the spirit contained within its very letters.

June 8 is Beth Chai's Shavuot Celebration—

Please bring fresh fruit and other special treats for gift baskets to be delivered to LTHP and the Hebrew Home. Cherries, apricots, and other special treats will be especially appreciated.

See Rain's letter, page 4, for more details.

June 1 is Beth Chai Community Work Day —

For those participating in sandwich making at Burning Tree Elementary . . .

Please bring a few loaves of relatively nutritious bread and a couple jars of peanut butter and jelly.

See page 5 for more details.

Beth Chai Directory

Position	Name (* = Board Member)	Email
Rabbi	Dr. Arthur Blecher	ablecher@starpower.net
Education Director	Rain Zohav	rainzohav@earthlink.net
President	David Elfin*	elfind@verizon.net
Vice President/Immediate Past President	Andrew Strongin*	astrongin@starpower.net
Secretary	Sara Duke*	saraduke1@verizon.net
Treasurer	Joe Gitchell*	jgitchel@pinneyassociates.com
Communications Chair	Julie Vigdor*	julievigdor@yahoo.com
Liturgy Chair	Philip Resnik	resnik@umd.edu
Membership Co-Chair	Shannon Rudisill*	JMG_SLR@hotmail.com
Membership Co-Chair	Julie Zalkind	juliehz@comcast.net
Music Chair	Marji Ross*	mross@eaglepub.com
Program Co-Chair	Ken Jacobson*	kenjacobson@hotmail.com
Program Co-Chair	Mark Bauman	mbauman@ngs.org
School Parent Council	Susan Stewart*	ssstew@aol.com
Social Action Chair	Howie Feinstein*	khfeinstein@verizon.net
Volunteers Chair	Daniel Korn*	dkorn@comcast.net
Bookkeeper/Accounts Payable	Diane Page	dianepage@verizon.net
Correspondent	Elizabeth Mumford	eam222@verizon.net
Fundraising Chair	Vacant	
Finance Committee	Ela Koniuszkow	Ela.mike@verizon.net
Finance Committee	Warren Milberg	imcrewzen@hotmail.com
Newsletter Editor	Elise Hughes	Browne.hughes@gmail.com
Sunday School Volunteer Coordinator	Phyllis Kristal	Kristal@fr.com
Tot Shabbat Coordinator	Joe Gitchell	jgitchel@pinneyassociates.com
Website Manager	Mary Jo Shapiro	Mjhashap-bethchai@yahoo.com
Beth Chai email		info@bethchai.org
Beth Chai Website		www.bethchai.org

Financial Need Policy: Beth Chai welcomes anyone to attend services, become a member, or have their children attend our Jewish Family School, regardless of ability to pay. Considerations available include extended payment plans, service exchange, and fee reduction. Financial aid determination will be made on a case by case basis. Please contact Pat Lovenhart, Treasurer, for assistance.

Community News

Farewell to Our Friend Ron

Dozens of members of Beth Chai as well as Ron Leve's friends from various Dupont Circle civic groups celebrated his life at a lovely and moving memorial service on May 2. Thanks to Rabbi Blecher, Mary Ellen Petrisko, Joyce Weinstein and the committee for organizing such a tremendous tribute.

Mitzvahs

Alexander Gandal, son of Matt and Trina Gandal, will have his Bar Mitzvah on June 14th at RRUUC at 10 a.m. All Beth Chai congregation members are invited to the service and to join Alexander and his family for a Kiddush afterwards.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Yevgeniya Nusinovich on receiving her PhD in Molecular Medicine (specializing in Molecular and Cellular Oncology) from George Washington University this past January. Yevgeniya's continuing to pursue her M.D. from GW as well.

Preachers, Prophets, and Primaries



There has been much in the news lately about the outspoken pastors of Presidential candidates. Although my own views differ from those of Rev. Wright and Rev. Hagee, I do identify with both these clerics. The challenge for any preacher in America today is to express ideas that have both immediate impact and enduring relevance. We might call this finding the prophetic voice. The difficulty, of course, is that the same words which ring out with clarity today often can sound sour and false tomorrow.

The Hebrew Bible understood a prophet (*navee*) to be an appointment messenger of God. The prophet's words contained truth because the prophet has divine authority. Our ancestors also wrote about the many false prophets, with trumped-up claims of divine knowledge. How to tell the true from the false? The Bible's solution is remarkably straight-forward and non-supernatural: those preachers whose prophecies stood the test of time were deemed true.

The great Hebrew prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah foretold the conquest of the Jewish State and the destruction of the Temple and promised the eventual reestablishment of the Jewish State and a rebuilt Temple. However there really is no mystery to the fact that their visions came true. The Jewish scholars who centuries later selected the writings to include in the Biblical canon had the benefit of history. They simply preserved those voices which stood the test of time and discarded those writings which did not.

I have always been intrigued by the fact that the rabbis long ago declared an end to prophecy. They did so in response to the claims of competing sects and the emerging power of the Church. But the implications of Judaism's decision to go forward without the benefit of further divine revelation are profound. With no oracles, burning bushes or tablets from Sinai, the responsibility for finding truth rests entirely upon human shoulders.

In the end, the criterion by which we validate the prophetic voices of our own generation is the same burden of proof that applied in Isaiah's day: which words stand the test of time and which do not.

ART

(Continued from page 1)

The Board would like to express its heartfelt thanks on behalf of the congregation to Deborah, a former President, Pat and fellow outgoing board members Reed Dewey (Membership), Rob Weinstein (Liturgy) and Mike Wexler (Programs), a former Vice President.

Thanks to all of you for the many hours of hard work this past year and over the years! We will be relying on your counsel in the year ahead, too.

We're also happy to report that in non-board positions, Mark Bauman has agreed to replace Mike as Programs co-chair, Elise Brown Hughes has agreed to become our Newsletter Editor, Philip Resnik has agreed to replace Rob as Liturgy Chair (with Andrew filling that role at board meetings) and Ela Koniuszkow and Warren Milberg will co-chair our newly-created Finance Committee.

We're also very pleased that Diane Page is staying on in her non-board position of Bookkeeper/Accounts Payable along



with Mary Jo Shapiro (Website Manager) and Julie Zalkind (Membership Co-Chair).

The Board still lacks an Auction/Fundraising Chair to replace Ron. Please contact David, Andrew or Joe if you're interested in filling this important and fulfilling position.

Sara, Joe and Daniel are all parents in the School and active participants in Adult Ed. You probably know Sara best as the Lost and Found lady, Joe as the Tot Shabbat coordinator and Daniel as one of the auction lieutenants of our late, beloved Ron Leve. Please congratulate our new board members on their election.

As always, Rabbi Art Blecher and Educational Director Rain Zohav will serve as ex officio members of the Board and attend our meetings.

The first meeting of the 2008-09 Board will take place on Sunday June 22 at David Elfin's house, 8206 Bryant Drive, Bethesda (301) 320-5646. As always, all congregation members are welcome to attend.

Letter from the Education Director - June 2008



Dear Congregants,

In June we have two days of Sunday programming before we take our summer break. On Sunday, June 1, we have Community Work Day from 10 a.m. – noon at two different locations. Please see Howie's article on page 5 for details.

On June 8, we will have a congregational celebration of Shavuot. Shavuot, like many of my favorite Jewish holidays, has both agricultural roots and historical meaning. We will be celebrating both this year. My fondest memories of Jewish holidays are how we celebrated them on the kibbutz. Shavuot is no exception. Especially because it does have such strong agricultural roots, Shavuot was reclaimed by the secular Zionists of the kibbutz movement. In our kibbutz, every agricultural branch of the kibbutz would decorate their tractors and bring an offering to a central field. I worked in the landscape department of the kibbutz and we were very busy in the days before Shavuot, providing flowers for everyone and planning our own exhibit. Several years we made miniature gardens, using all our own materials and one year, I prepared an exhibit of every cultivated tree and shrub on the kibbutz with their names in Hebrew, Latin and English. On the day of Shavuot, we would have a grand tractor parade to the central field. We would have folks dance performances, songs, and skits by the children. We will be trying to create some of that atmosphere this year in our celebration, however, sorry – no tractors! (Also, at the conclusion of our June 8 session, we will have our end of the year picnic — rain or shine. We have reserved the all purpose room in case of rain.)

Historically, Shavuot was originally one of the three pilgrimage festivals. The other two were Passover and Sukkot. Shavuot was the time when the Israelites would bring their first fruits to the Temple. These would go the priests and their assistants, who had no land of their own and would also be distributed to the poor. In this spirit, our students will be filling baskets with fruit and other goodies for the LTHP and the Hebrew Home. We need everyone to bring fresh fruit and other goodies for the baskets. It is especially nice if you can bring something that folks may not have eaten yet and that are something of a luxury like cherries or apricots. The mitzvah class and their parents will distribute the baskets to the Hebrew Home. I am also asking that all the children come in white shirts or tops if possible.

The other aspect of Shavuot is that traditionally this is the day that the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai and received the Ten Commandments after the Exodus from Egypt. Our students will get a chance to join the adults in a Tour of a Torah Scroll led by Rabbi Leila Gal Berner. I do think that at least once in their Beth Chai education, our children should get to see a Torah scroll. The last time we had a Torah scroll in the school was about five years ago. Rabbi Berner has a PhD in Jewish studies and was ordained as a Reconstructionist Rabbi. I have studied Jewish history with her in the Melton Adult Education series and am currently studying Biblical history and civilization with her. She is a wonderful teacher and I am sure both adults and children will enjoy her tour immensely.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the folks who filled out our school survey. We are taking all ideas and suggestions into consideration as we plan for next year. One thing that was clear from the surveys is that we need to improve teacher communication about what your students are learning in the classroom. We will be brainstorming ideas in the Parent Council to see if we can improve this area of our school. For now, I would like to let parents know that the curriculum summary for all grades and for Hebrew are posted on our website, as well as the full curriculum for the teachers' use. You should have all received a letter from your child's teacher about what they learned this year and also a letter from Ophra Paul, our Hebrew teacher. You will see that Oprah was able to supplement the basic vocabulary by quite a lot this year. If you did not receive these letters by email, please let me know and I will resend.

I look forward to seeing you on Community Work Day and on Shavuot.

B'Shalom,

Rain Zohav

Babi Yar by Yevgeny Yevtushenko

A number of those who attended the Shabbat service on May 2 have asked about the lines of poetry read by Yevgeniya Nusinovich in both Russian and English during the segment honoring Holocaust Commemoration Day. These lines were from *Babi Yar*, a celebrated poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a controversial Russian poet. Published in 1961, the poem recalled the massacre of nearly 34,000 Jews by the SS at a ravine near Kiev on September 29-30, 1941, while also raising questions about the official Soviet version of the atrocity.

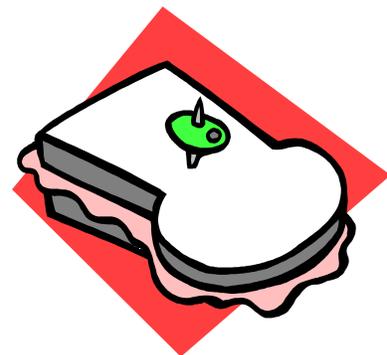
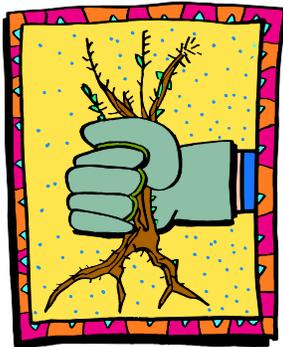
Community Workday Opportunities

On Sunday June 1, 10:00 a.m. – noon, Beth Chai will hold its annual Community Workday, a major part of our congregation-wide mission to contribute to our community. This year, we will once again have both indoor and outdoor activities available for your participation:

At Burning Tree Elementary School: We will make sandwiches, for distribution to those in need, through Martha's Table in DC. We are returning to this activity due to the significantly-increased demand for food in our area. Everyone (including children) is welcome to join in -- please bring a few loaves of relatively nutritious (avoid white bread) bread, and a couple of jars of peanut-butter and jelly. The on-site coordinators for this project are Deborah Balaschak (balasig@verizon.net) and Shannon Rudisill (JMG_SLR@hotmail.com).

At Sligo Creek Park: Friends of Sligo Creek has asked that we assist their environmental effort by eradicating the garlic mustard plant, which is interfering with the important natural growth in the creek-bed. Work-gloves will be provided, and an expert will be on hand to explain plant identification and procedures. The precise location will be publicized in advance. The on-site coordinator for this project is Karen Feinstein (khfeinstein@verizon.net, 301-564-9482).

For any questions, please contact social action chair Howard Feinstein (khfeinstein@verson.net, 301-564-9482). We are aiming for as close to 100% congregation participation as possible – please choose one activity and come on out!!



Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sun., June 1, 10:00 AM - noon	Community Work Day: Sandwich making for Martha's Table at Burning Tree; Sligo Park Cleanup	Burning Tree Elementary School 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda - or - Sligo Park
Sun., June 8, 9:30 AM Assembly 10 – 11 AM, Classes and Adult Ed 11 – noon, Torah Scroll Tour noon, Potluck Picnic	Special Shavuot Program Adult Ed: Receiving Torah at Sinai – Its Meaning Then and Now Torah Scroll Tour led by Rabbi Gal Berner	Burning Tree Elementary School 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sat., June 14, 10:00 AM	Bar Mitzvah of Alexander Gandal. All members of Beth Chai are invited to attend the service, which will be followed by a Kiddush.	Beth Chai Congregation at River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation (RRUUC), 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD
Sun., June 22 7:00 PM	Beth Chai board meeting. All interested members are welcome to attend.	Home of David Elfin, 8206 Bryant Drive, Bethesda



Beth Chai Congregation

River Road U.U.C.
6301 River Road
Bethesda, MD 20817

Address Correction Requested

Answering service: 301-229-7400
Email: info@bethchai.org
Website: www.bethchai.org