



# BETH CHAI NEWS

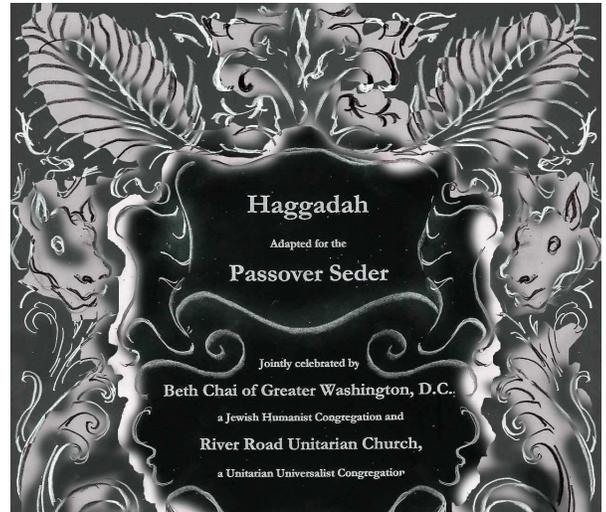
The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

## Join Us for Seder and Song at Our Annual Beth Chai / River Road Community Passover Seder

Every year for some years now, we have celebrated a joint community Passover Seder with our friends at River Road Unitarian Church. It will be held this year on Sat. April 7 at 6:00 PM at RRUC—if you plan to be in town, don't miss out on this wonderful event. We use our own humanist and inclusive *Haggadah*, revised and updated in 2006, and illustrated with original artwork by Beth Chai member Rob Weinstein.

For this event to be a success, we need a few things from you – first, tell us you're planning to attend; volunteer to come early for set-up (5:00) or stay afterwards for cleanup; and finally, bring a potluck dish to serve 8-10 people (with its contents labeled for the benefit of those with various dietary restrictions, e.g., Kosher for Passover, vegetarian, allergen-avoidance). Beth Chai and RRUC will provide the ceremonial items for the Seder and other items. Space is limited, so please send in your reservation form as soon as possible (enclosed in the March newsletter). April 4th is the last day for RSVPs. (RSVPs can be sent to Beth Chai Congregation at R.R.U.C. 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20817.)

We need help from one and all to make this event happen! This year you can also pay for your reservations online: Visit the newsletter page of the web site, [www.bethchai.org/newsletter.html](http://www.bethchai.org/newsletter.html), and scroll down to the credit card payment button and follow the instructions you'll find there. Remember, you *still need to fill out an RSVP form* — you can also find the form on the web site — so we know what you will be bringing. Thank you!



Cover page from our Passover Haggadah, with artwork by Beth Chai member Rob Weinstein.

Adult Education for April:

## Islamic Identity

**April 22: Background to Islam – The Construction of Identity.**

Following on the two-part exploration of the Islamic and Jewish traditions led by Beth Chai member Karim Chaibi and Rabbi Art Blecher, Karim will elaborate upon some of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices that help make Muslims who they are. Among the subjects considered will be: the religious and practical rights and duties of men and women; the connection between sexuality, in its various forms, and sin; concepts of faith and apostasy, including the limits and consequences of irreverence; and the organization and power of religious authority.

**April 29: (At the Beth Chai Retreat) Israel Through the Window of Literature**, especially Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, presented by Rain Zohav. [Further information will be sent out via the mailing list.]



See Page 5 for a wrap-up and more photos from the Beth Chai Auction!

## Beth Chai Directory

Position	Name (* = Board Member)	Telephone	Email
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Webmaster	Jules Aronson	301-229-9239	jparonson@speakeasy.net
Beth Chai Web Site	Beth Chai Answering Service/ Email	301-229-7400	www.bethchai.org; info@bethchai.org

### Community News

#### Condolences

- ☆ Condolences to Mike Wexler on the loss of his cousin.

#### Bat Mitzvah

- ☆ Julie Elfin, daughter of David Elfin and Loretta Garcia, will have her Bat Mitzvah on April 21 at RRUC at 10 AM. Please come celebrate with Julie and her family. The congregation is invited to share challah, juice and wine after the service.

**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 Diane Page for assistance.

### Beth Chai Board Candidates

It is with great pleasure that we present to following slate of candidates for the Beth Chai Board. The nominees for new two year terms are:

Andrew Strongin – President  
 David Elfin – Vice President  
 Pat Lovenhart – Treasurer  
 Reed Dewey – Membership Chair  
 Marji Ross – Music Chair  
 Shannon Rudisill – Community-Building Chair  
 Susan Stewart – Family School Chair  
 Julie Vigdor – Communications Chair

Returning members to the board serving the second year of their terms are:

Deborah Balaschak – Secretary/Past President  
 Howie Feinstein – Social Action Chair  
 Ron Leve - Fundraising Chair  
 Rob Weinstein – Liturgy Chair  
 Mike Wexler – Program Co-Chair

The slate of candidates will be voted on at the annual meeting in May.

— The nominating committee.

## Rabbi's Message



# Judaism in America Today — Part III

The theme of keeping Judaism alive is often expressed in terms of numbers. Jews are insecure about their status in America and concerned lest they become too small a minority to protect themselves. That protection is two-fold. Jews want to have sufficient power as an organized community to defend their separateness from the encroachments of the majority. At the same time, they are aware that by being separate they risk being a target of prejudice. So they monitor the Jewish population not just by its absolute numbers but by its growth relative to other groups. However, self-interest is not the only reason Jews seek influence in America. They also want to have a voice in the world. They want to have impact on society. Dreading oblivion and embracing life are two faces of a single coin. The notion of leaving the world a better place may be a platitude, but it is highly motivating for Jews today. Enduring influence is the other form of life-after-death the Jewish people offers its members.

It is a basic concept of American Judaism that the individual achieves immortality through membership with an eternal people. Whether understood as an explicit philosophical formulation, or merely assumed as a part of general cultural outlook, the belief has a tangible effect on how many Jews live their lives. Individuals who are strongly self-identified as Jews observe no absolute boundary between the fate of each Jew and the fate of the Jewish people. Because the memory of the ancestors is sacred above all things, every Jew's individual identity is subsumed within the identity of the Jews as a civilization, and Jews can only continue to exist as a civilization if Jewish identity is preserved throughout future generations. This is why the survival of Judaism assumes the immediacy of a life-or-death struggle and why the Jewish community constantly monitors its vital signs for the slightest indication of trouble. With so much at stake, false alarms about disappearance are inevitable, and the myth of Jewish disappearance is quickly believed.

**RABBI ARTHUR BLECHER**

## April 2007 Shabbat Service and Program

# Holocaust Remembrance Day: Re-examining What We 'Know'

**Friday, April 13.** A wealth of records kept under lock and key for six decades in Bad Arolsen, Germany, may become accessible within the next 12 months, shedding new light on the Holocaust. A great deal of information is already available, however – and yet, some of what passes for knowledge of the Nazi persecutions and the circumstances surrounding them is incomplete, misleading, or just plain inaccurate.

On the occasion of Beth Chai and River Road Unitarian Church's annual observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day – Yom HaShoah, which falls this year on April 15 – we will take a careful look at the validity of some widely held assumptions regarding the events and their background, and at some familiar images that emblemize them. We will also attempt to assess the degree to which popular commemorations of the Holocaust reflect the traditional Jewish value of remembering. Rabbi Art Blecher will be joined by Beth Chai member Ken Jacobson, author of a book on Holocaust history, in offering some suggestions for discussion.

### Schedule

**7-8 pm:** A light supper costing \$10 per person will be set out buffet style at 7. Those wishing to join in are asked to sign up by contacting Ron Leve before noon on Thursday, April 12, either by email at [TheRon@comcast.net](mailto:TheRon@comcast.net) or by phone at 202-496-9292.

**8-8:40 pm:** Beth Chai's Shabbat service, expanded this month to honor Yom HaShoah, features a humanistic Kiddush, thought-provoking readings, and roles for children wishing to participate.

**8:40-9:45 pm:** Retracing our steps, testing our vision.

**Location of all Beth Chai Shabbats**  
(unless otherwise indicated):  
Beth Chai Congregation at River Road Unitarian Church, Fireside Room (2nd floor), 6301 River Rd. (entrance on Whittier Blvd.), Bethesda

## Letter from the Education Director - April 2007



*Dear Congregants,*

Many thanks to all who helped make Purim such a joyous celebration. You know who you are!

If Purim is our “spring fever” holiday- wishing for spring, hoping for spring, by Passover, spring has actually arrived. It is no wonder that traditionally the Song of Songs is read during the festival of Passover.

“Arise my beloved, my fair one,  
And come away:  
For lo, the winter is past.  
Flowers appear on the earth,  
The time of singing is here.

The song of the dove  
Is heard in our land.  
Let us go down to the vineyards  
To see if the vines are budded.  
There will I give you my love.”

— (Song of Songs, 2:10 -12, from *A Passover Haggadah, The New Union Haggadah*)

Michael Strassfeld, in his book, *The Jewish Holidays – a Guide and Commentary*, writes, “Another name for Passover is *hag ha-aviv*- the holiday of spring. Thus, the holiday of liberation is also the holiday of spring, not simply by coincidence but by design. Following the bleakness of winter when everything is covered with snow, spring marks the rebirth of the earth with the bursting forth of green life. Similarly, a people shackled in oppressive slavery, doomed to a slow process of degradation or even extinction, bursts forth out of Egypt into a new life’s journey leading to a land flowing with milk and honey.” (p.5-6).

What does all this have to do with Sunday school during the month of April? First of all, we take off April 1 for Passover, and continue with taking off April 8 for our spring break. I hope that families enjoy using the seder plates, Kiddush cups and Miriam’s cups that our students created this year at your seders.

Then, on April 15, we have Community work day. There will be several choices of ways to participate this year, including the cleanup activity at Sligo Creek. [Further information about the Sligo Creek activity, including times and location, will be sent out on our mailing list.]

At Burning Tree, we will again be making items for the NIH Children’s Inn to bring a little bit of springtime cheer to children who are seriously ill and we will be bringing baskets of fruit and other goodies to the elderly, in co-operation with the Jewish Social Service Agency. This is a day for the entire congregation to get involved in several exciting projects. There are no formal classes on this day, but many opportunities to learn by doing. This is considered a school day, no matter which site you choose to go to. The Burning Tree site is appropriate for K – seniors. We need parents to be with their children at all sites and to participate and supervise them fully. All participants at Burning Tree are asked to bring fruit and other edibles to fill the baskets for the seniors. We will also need participants who can deliver the baskets and plan to spend time visiting with the elders. All other materials will be provided by Beth Chai.

The meeting with the rising Mitzvah class parents has been rescheduled for April 22.

Yom Ha’ Atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) is on April 23 this year. Students will be learning about this important event of the Jewish people in their classrooms and continuing their learning at the retreat.

Lastly, on April 28-29, we will have our first ever Beth Chai retreat at beautiful Shepard Springs Retreat Center. Although the official deadline for registration was March 30, we may possibly be able to squeeze in a few more families, depending on our numbers. If you are interested, please contact Rain ASAP. Don’t forget that there is the option of coming up on Sunday only for children’s activities and adult ed. You need to register for that also, so we can make sure to have enough lunch. Then you can enjoy hiking with your family in the afternoon. Plans are shaping up nicely for wonderful springtime event, connected to learning about Shabbat, Israel, and nature.

*B'Shalom,*

*Rain Zohav*

## Another Rousing Success for Beth Chai Auction

For the second year in a row, the Beth Chai auction held on March 11<sup>th</sup> at Burning Tree Elementary raised a significant chunk of cash for our Congregation. Because of the Newsletter deadline, we don't have the final total, but it appears to be only slightly less than the fifteen thousand taken in last year. And, as all who were there can vouch for, a great time was had by all.

It cannot be emphasized enough that making an event of this sort successful is more than a one-man effort. Julie Zalkind spent endless days both contacting members regarding their donations and spearheading the behind the scene task of producing the catalog and database, which enabled the auction process to run smoothly. The pleasing and organized layout of the tables and bid sheets is, of course, credited to Rachel Feldman, who had it all mapped out and directed the crew setting things up early that Sunday morning. Miriam Meyer made the Beth Chai Café a success, from obtaining food from members and merchants to setting it up and having it run smoothly. Our Beth Chai Local Area Network and smooth checkout operation was led by Walter Scott and his band of tech associates.



We are also indebted to our musicians, Celia Feldman and Howie Feinstein and our live auctioneer, Art Blecher. Finally, and we're sorry that space prevents us from listing all the names, the auction would not have worked without those who wrote and proofread the catalog, contacted donors, helped setup and cleanup, collected and organized bid sheets, worked the live auction and worked the checkout process. Last, but surely not least, are you our members, and some non-members, who donated items and services that were our offerings.

One further note: If you patronize anyone who has donated to our auction, please let them know that you're associated with Beth Chai. This will let them know that you appreciate their support and help when we contact them in the future.



Bottom left: Howie Feinstein's jazz piano enlivens the proceedings; Top right: Beth Chai President Deborah Balaschak ponders whether to place a bid; Bottom right: Ron Leve shows off our high-tech bid number identification system (paper plates).

# Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sun. April 1	No Sunday School or Adult Ed.- Spring Break	
Sat. April 7 at 6 pm	Beth Chai's Annual Community Seder with River Road U.C.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sun. April 8	No Sunday School or Adult Ed.- Spring Break - Passover	
Fri., April 13, Light supper at 7 PM. Shabbat Service at 8 PM.	"Holocaust Remembrance Day: Reexamining What We 'Know'"	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, Fireside Room on second floor. 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sun. April 15 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Community Work Day	
Sat. April 21 at 10:00 AM	Bat Mitzvah of Julie Elfin, daughter of David Elfin and Loretta Garcia, The congregation is invited to share challah, juice and wine after the service.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sun. April 22 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed. Yom Ha' Atzmaut (Israeli Independence day)	Sunday School. Rising Mitzvah Class Parent Meeting. Adult Ed. "Background to Islam – The Construction of Identity." Led by Beth Chai member Karim Chaibi and Rabbi Art Blecher.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. April 22 from 7-9 pm	Beth Chai board meeting. All interested members are welcome to attend.	Home of Howie and Karen Feinstein. 6009 Conway Rd, Bethesda, MD
Sat. April 28- Sun. April 29	Beth Chai Congregational Retreat	Shepherd Springs Retreat Center, 16869 Taylor's Landing Road Sharpsburg, Maryland



## Beth Chai Congregation

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Address Correction Requested



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