



BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

February 20 Shabbat Dinner and Program Explore What Makes “Jewish Art” Jewish

Jewish art as we know it today—non-ritual objects made for non-ritual purposes—dates no further back than the end of the 17th century. Before that, artwork of a Jewish character was limited to ritual objects. And even these were more than likely produced by non-Jews, since Jews were not normally allowed to be silversmiths or goldsmiths, being excluded from membership in the guilds. Thus, many of the ceremonial objects in Judaica collections, though used by Jewish communities, were made on commission by non-Jewish manufacturers or artisans. It was these objects’ function, not their provenance, that made them specifically Jewish.

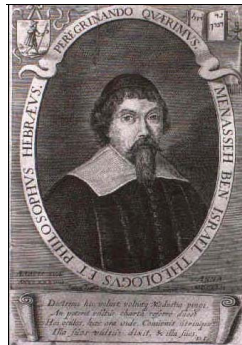
It was only with Jewish emancipation in Europe, which began a little over 200 years ago, that the activity of Jewish artists creating “art for art’s sake” went into full swing. This development has raised a thorny issue, exemplified by such questions as: Is a portrait of a Jew by a Jewish artist more a work of “Jewish art” than the portrait of a non-Jew by a Jewish artist?

Beth Chai member Joyce Ellen Weinstein, an award-winning visual artist and student of Jewish art, will lead an illustrated discussion examining this issue at our next Shabbat dinner program, to be held **Friday, Feb. 20**, at Beth Chai Congregation at River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Road in Bethesda (enter parking lot from Whittier Blvd.).

Welcome, New Members ...

Hillary Fitis and Mark Hodor, with daughters Gabrielle, who attends the preschool class, and Alyssa (age 1½)

Philip Simon and daughter Sophia, who is in 5th grade



These two portraits of Rabbi Manasseh Ben Israel of Amsterdam were both created in the mid 1600s. One artist was Jewish, one was not. Can you tell which artist was Jewish? Would you consider either or both to be “Jewish” art?



Schedule

6:45 p.m.: Tot Shabbat, under the supervision of Joe Gitchell and Elizabeth Mumford, begins in the Library, just across the hall from the Fireside Room on the mezzanine at RRUUC.

7-8 p.m.: A light supper costing \$12

per adult (post-mitzvah and older) and \$6 per child (ages 6-12) will be set out buffet style in RRUUC’s mezzanine-level Fireside Room at 7. Those wishing to join in are asked to sign up by contacting Julie Vigdor (julievigdor@yahoo.com or 202-537-1001) before noon on Thursday, Feb. 19. Food will be put aside for diners who will be attending the Tot Shabbat service, which is likely to end after the start of the supper; please let Julie know if you expect to arrive late.

8-8:25 p.m.: Beth Chai’s Shabbat service features a humanistic Kiddush,

thought-provoking readings, roles for children wishing to participate, and song leader Andrea Foster.

8:30-9:30 p.m. (or later): Defining Jewish art: by the producer or the production?

Don’t Forget the Cans!

We will be collecting canned and other nonperishable food donations at each monthly Shabbat. All donations will go to the Jewish Social Services Agency to benefit those in need in the metropolitan area.

—Ken Jacobson

Beth Chai Leadership Directory

Position	Name (* = board member)	E-mail
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 Resnick	resnick@umd.edu
Membership Co-Chair	Shannon Rudisill*	jmg_slr@hotmail.com
Membership Co-Chair	Julie Zalkind	julie@hzmgt.com
Music Chair	Marji Ross*	mross@eaglepub.com
Program Co-Chair	Ken Jacobson*	kenjacobson@hotmail.com
Program Co-Chair	Mark Bauman	mbauman@ngs.org
School Parents 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
Newsletter Editor	Elise Browne Hughes	browne.hughes@gmail.com
Sunday School Volunteer Coordinator	Phyllis Kristal	kristal@fr.com
Tot Shabbat Coordinator	Joe Gitchell	jgitchel@pinneyassociates.com
Website Manager	Daniel Korn	dkorn@comcast.net
Beth Chai E-mail		info@bethchai.org
Beth Chai Web Site		www.bethchai.org

Financial Need Policy: Beth Chai welcomes anyone to attend services, become a member, or have their children attend our Beth Chai 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 Joe Gitchell, treasurer, for assistance.

Beth Chai's King Day a True Community Event

Beth Chai's annual Martin Luther King Day program celebration was a true congregation-wide celebration this year, combining family school students and teachers, adult education participants, and guest speakers.

The discussion was led by two guest speakers: Gloria Mobley, former executive director of Leadership Greater Washington and a consultant on multicultural issues, and her daughter, Izetta Mobley, chief diversity officer of College Summit, a college access organization, and a contributor to NPR and other media. Together they offered a multi-generational perspective on the then-imminent inauguration of President Obama and its meaning for civil rights and a multi-cultural society. Beth Chai members reflected on

their own defining moments from the historic 2008 election campaign, and the long struggle for freedom and equality for all Americans.

Following the adult education segment of the program, family school children and teachers gave accounts of what they had learned during the morning's classroom emphasis on Dr. King and his legacy.

The program culminated with everyone joining hands and singing the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome." We all look forward to future congregation-wide celebration of King Day.

—Howie Feinstein

Message From the Rabbi

Over the past couple of weeks, I have had some very thought-provoking conversations and email exchanges about how we can continue to foster the spirit of the close-knit community that has been a signature quality of Beth Chai for many years. Of course, as with any congregation, there is a wide range of participation among our membership. Some of our members participate only to the extent of attending services on the High Holidays. Other members devote a great deal of their time and talent by volunteering to help with programs and events, while some members take on the responsibility for governing the congregation. If you are reading these words, then you are in fact participating in the life of Beth Chai to a greater extent than many people on our membership list.



Because we are first and foremost an independent congregation—and a unique one at that—we cannot depend upon any national organization to supply us with either governing policy or program resources. We have had to develop our own, and we have done so very well in both areas. If we are to continue to thrive as a congregation, we will need a steady flow of member contributions of time and ideas.

Because we are a small congregation without administrative staff, we rely upon our members to manage the daily nuts and bolts of our institutional life. When members donate their time for relatively mundane tasks, sometimes the effort is not cost-effective compared with hiring someone to do the job. Nonetheless, I believe it is always worthwhile because all volunteerism builds community. Every task, whether serving on the board of directors, or running the auction, or washing coffee mugs, enables the community to function.

I suppose these things are hard to quantify, but I am convinced that the more people who participate actively in the day-by-day operating of our congregation, the greater will be the spirit of community we enjoy. And the greater the numbers of volunteers, the more closely will that community be knit together.

Rabbi Art Blecher

Adult Education for February

Appraising Secularism in America, Plus Congregational Goals

Here's a look at this month's adult education programming. All sessions take place on Sundays at Burning Tree Elementary School, 10 a.m. to noon.

Feb. 1: The Secularist Enterprise in America—and Jews' Relationship to It What are Secularism and Secularist Humanism? What are their stated values and practical goals? What are the limits of their adherents' integration into mainstream U.S. culture and political life? Do American Jews face different—and perhaps lower—barriers in reconciling secular and religiously based identities than Jews in other places, or than their non-Jewish fellow citizens? Jacques Berlinerblau, Professor of Jewish Civilization at Georgetown University and a double PhD in Sociology and Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, will suggest some answers to these questions and raise a few of his own regarding the current vitality of American Secularism and potential alternative avenues for its energies. The author of *The Secular Bible*, Berlinerblau will also follow on Rabbi Art Blecher's January talks on why humanists need to read

the classical texts by discussing the significance of understanding Judaism for secular Jews. (Copies of *The Secular Bible* will be available for sale and signature.)

Feb. 22: The Essence of Beth Chai—Spirit and Practice As members of Beth Chai, we've devoted much discussion time to what it means to us to be Jews, but far less to what it means to be a member of our own congregation. This special session is meant to bring the latter issue to the fore. What do members expect of and want from Beth Chai? How involved do they feel in the congregation's operation and governance, and in what ways do they want to participate? What do they believe is expected of them as members, and how well do they feel this has been communicated to them? Such questions will be addressed in the first hour of this session, which will be led by Rabbi Art Blecher. In the second hour, members will have a chance to speak individually or in small groups with the representatives of Beth Chai's Parents' Council and members of the board, including leaders of such activities as social action, volunteer coordination, and liturgy.



Notes From the Education Director

Dear Congregants,

On our Martin Luther King Day celebration (Jan. 18), we enjoyed one of those special Beth Chai moments as the children got to share what they had been learning with the adults and then we all sang “We Shall Overcome,” with hearts filled with the wonder of what has been overcome, and the knowledge that there is work yet to be done.

Welcome to our new full time pre-school teacher, Jessica Katz, who is off to a great start.

I want to encourage parents to ask their children to teach them the Hebrew words they are learning in Sunday school. They will enjoy being the ones doing the teaching for a change, and our collective Hebrew knowledge will grow.

We meet on Feb. 1 for a regular school day. Post Mitzvah class also meets on Feb. 1.

On Feb. 8th, we will be having a special intergenerational event to celebrate Tu B'Shevat. This program, which will run from 9:30 to noon (with no music assembly or regular classes), is being planned by award-winning educator, Mary Meyer-son, in consultation with me. Among other things, we will use recycled materials to create musical instruments and decorative picture frames. The theme of the day is Tikkun Olam through the arts, and many creative outlets will be utilized, including creative writing and film. Parents will accompany and interact with their children at all the various learning centers as we have found that the students prefer to spend this time with their parents, learning together.

Of particular interest to adults will be a segment of the day led by Rabbi Blecher, the showing of the Academy Award-winning film *The Man who Planted Trees*, and various hands-on tzedakah projects. More details to follow by email.



This program is funded in part by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington as part of our overall Initiative in Congregational Education grant, “Building Community Through the Arts.”

This grant is also funding our music educator, Andrea Foster, who has been teaching and leading singing at our monthly Shabbat services. We are becoming a more musical congregation as we learn some of our songs together in such a welcoming atmosphere. Andrea’s gentle presence on Friday nights is greatly appreciated.

The third element of the grant this year is being used to fund Mike Fox of the Yesodot Israeli Dance Troupe to come and teach Israeli dancing at some of our Sunday morning sessions. Mike is a gifted teacher and has gotten many of us up on our feet and dancing to both classic and new Israeli dances. He is very attentive to our program. He noticed that we sing “Od Yavo Shalom” and therefore taught us the new dance that has been composed to go with this popular song.

The suggestion to include Israeli dancing came out of the Parents’ Council. So if you have an idea of something new to try at Sunday School, please contact me, Parent Council Chair Susan Stewart, or any member of the Parent Council, and we will discuss it for next year. Many thanks to the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington for helping us add this enriching aspect to our program!

Please note that there will be no school on President’s Day weekend, *unless* we get snowed out on Feb. 8. In that case, Feb. 15 will be our snow makeup day for the special Tu B’Shevat program.

We meet on Feb. 22 for a regular Sunday school day.

Enjoy the winter, drink some hot chocolate, and remember that even though it is cold outside, the camaraderie of Beth Chai warms the spirit.

B’Shalom,

Rain Zohav

President's Report



Fellow members,

I realize that my comments prior to the adult education session on Jan. 11 seemed overly abrupt to some and I regret that we did not have time planned for discussion.

I do not, however, want the congregation to lose sight of the larger point, that because Beth Chai is a volunteer-run organization, more is desired and expected of members beyond just showing up on Sundays and paying dues and tuition.

We have never been a typical synagogue with a national affiliation, old-guard board of directors, and a paid administrative staff, where getting involved can seem daunting and also unnecessary because someone else will do the job.

Beth Chai is at its best when all of our members help to sustain us, even in seemingly small ways. Without all of us working together, there is no Beth Chai.

This is such an important point that we are going to devote our adult education session on Feb. 22 to a participatory discussion of what it means to be a Beth Chai member. Rabbi Blecher will moderate during the first hour. After the break, leaders of such areas as social action, volunteers, liturgy, and the Parent Council will explain how easy and rewarding it is to get involved at Beth Chai.

I urge every member to come and participate on Feb. 22. Without your input, we won't be able to maintain the sense of community that makes Beth Chai such a unique congregation.

Finally, Program Chair Ken Jacobson has assured me that our guest speakers expect some people to be on the periphery of the discussion working quietly, and that this is not a problem. So, those of you who prefer to work—including on your laptops—should feel free to continue to do so.

My best and hope to see everyone on Feb. 22.

David Elfin

Celebrate the Chinese New Year Beth Chai Style

Join Beth Chai for our annual Chinese New Year celebration on Sunday, Feb. 15 at 3 p.m. We will bring in the Year of the Ox at the acclaimed Mark's Duck House at 6184 Arlington Blvd (Rte 50), located near Seven Corners in Falls Church. This year we will partake of an interesting and delicious new ten-course banquet, followed by a short discussion led by Sheldon Hofferma on similarities and differences between the Jewish and Chinese cultures.

check to Sheldon Hofferma, P.O. Box 350, Fairfax Station VA 22039-0350. Checks must arrive by Feb. 13.

If you have any questions, please contact Sheldon at 703-323-1885 or ibkoolpaw@yahoo.com.

Mitzvah Committee Wants You

Our new mitzvah committee will meet on Sunday, Feb. 1, at 10:15 a.m. at Burning Tree to continue its work on developing guidance resources for Beth Chai parents and students as they plan their mitzvah ceremonies. If you have already held a Beth Chai bar/bat mitzvah, we'd love to include your expertise. Please join us!

For more information, or if you'd like to share your experiences but can't attend the meeting, contact Marji Ross (mross@eaglepub.com) or Michele McNally (mcsturm@verizon.net).



The cost is \$30 per person, tax and tip included, and reservations must be prepaid. Seating is limited. In order to guarantee your reservation, please bring cash or a check payable to Beth Chai to any service or school session and give it to an officer. Or mail your

Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sunday, Feb. 1 9:30 a.m. Assembly 10 a.m.–noon Classes & Adult Ed	Sunday School; Post-Mitzvah Class; Pre-School Class Adult Ed: “The Secularist Enterprise in America and Jews’ Relationship to It”	Burning Tree Elementary School 7900 Beech Tree Road, Bethesda
Sunday, Feb. 1 10:15 a.m.	Mitzvah Committee Meeting All interested members are welcome to participate.	Burning Tree Elementary School
Sunday, Feb. 8 9:30 a.m.–noon	Intergenerational Tu B’Shvat Program (No music assembly or regular classes/adult ed)	Burning Tree Elementary School
Sunday, Feb. 15	No Sunday School or Adult Ed (President’s Day) Snow date for Tu B’Shvat Program	
Sunday, Feb. 15 3 p.m.	Annual Beth Chai Chinese New Year’s Celebration Payment due to Sheldon Hofferan no later than Feb. 13 (see details on pg 5).	Mark’s Duck House 6184 Arlington Blvd. (Rte 50), Falls Church
Friday, Feb. 20 6:45 p.m. Tot Shabbat 7 p.m. Light Supper 8 p.m. Shabbat Service	Monthly Tot Shabbat and Shabbat service, featuring Andrea Foster as regular song leader, and discussion of “What Makes Jewish Art Jewish?” <i>Plus:</i> Nonperishable food collection for JSSA	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUUC, Fireside Room (2nd floor), 6301 River Road, Bethesda (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sunday, Feb. 22 9:30 a.m. Assembly 10–noon Classes	Sunday School; Pre-School Class Adult Ed: “The Essence of Beth Chai – Spirit and Practice”	Burning Tree Elementary School
Sunday, Feb. 22 7 p.m.	Board Meeting All interested members are welcome to attend.	Home of Julie & Billy Vigdor, 5108 44th St. N.W., Washington



BETH CHAI CONGREGATION

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