



BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

It's Chinese New Year's Time Again!



And that means it's time for our annual Beth Chai Chinese New Year's celebration: **Saturday, February 18 at 7:30 PM.** This year it will be held at a new location, the acclaimed Tempt-Asian Café in Northern Virginia (see page 3 for exact address, map, and driving directions). No stairs and free parking right outside! We will partake of a fabulous new ten-course banquet, followed by a short presentation by Sheldon Hofferan on "Jews and the Asian Silk Road."

The cost for Beth Chai members and guests is still just \$25 per person, tax and tip included, and reservations must be prepaid. In order to guarantee your reservation, please bring a check payable to Beth Chai to any service or school session and give it to an officer, or mail it to Sheldon Hofferan, P.O. Box 350, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-0350. Checks must arrive by February 16. *(Continued on page 3.)*

Beth Chai Auction — It's Happening!

by Ron Leve

Last month's newsletter announced the 2006 Beth Chai Auction on **March 26th.** I'm quite gratified with the responses from that article. Some people have volunteered to work on the event, several have already staked out restaurants that they will approach to donate, and there have been some new ideas for donations by members.

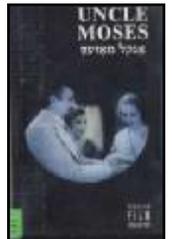
Let me suggest that you take a look at last year's catalog on the Beth Chai website as a way to stimulate your thoughts about what you might be able to offer (go to <http://www.bethchai.org/newsletter.html> and click on the link in the Auction 2006 article on that page). I just looked again and was amazed at the huge variety of donations of items and services we received. I'll bet that many of you have some special skill or access to marvelous places that others would be interested in.

While a fundraiser, the auction is also an opportunity to enhance the sense of community of Beth Chai — something that many folks have found here and are wanting even more of. So take a special look at the gatherings section at the beginning of the catalog where members have offered various types of get-togethers of our members. Do you have an interest that you might share with a group over a meal or wine and cheese? Perhaps a couple of you might jointly plan an event to share the effort? And, of course, the auction event itself is great fun. Here's a chance to schmooze along with bidding on great things and supporting us financially.

Please contact Ron Leve for further information or questions: 202-496-9292, TheRon@comcast.net.

Shabbat Service & Program:
Yiddish Language
Film Classic:
Uncle Moses

February 10: At this month's Shabbat, the giant of stage and screen, Maurice Schwartz, will do our talking for us — in Yiddish! The evening's program will be devoted to watching *Uncle Moses*, a 1932 film, extraordinary in its mixture of human emotion and class struggle, humor, and moral tension. Set on New York's Lower East Side, it is the story of a lordly and greedy yet somehow likeable sweatshop owner, the discontent among his workers, and his love for the daughter of one of them: a beautiful young woman who cares not for him but for a leftist union organizer. If you'd like to see great performers bring East European Jewish immigrant culture alive — and all in characteristic American Yiddish — this is the picture for you! (In Yiddish with English subtitles; running time, 87 minutes.)



Beth Chai encourages families with children to attend Shabbat evenings and follows a format intended to make their participation easy and enjoyable. There is a clear break between the service and the program that follows. Those who wish to attend only the service should feel free to leave during the break. *(For program schedule and location, see the box on page 2.)*

| Beth Chai Directory | Position | Telephone | Email |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|---|
| Suzanne Greenfield | Co-President | | greenfieldshapiro@msn.com |
| Deborah Signer Balaschak | Co-President | | balasig@verizon.net |
| Bob Rosenblatt | Vice President | | boblatt@aol.com |
| Ilene Sokolsky | Treasurer | | i.sokolsky@verizon.net |
| Diane Page | Bookkeeper/Accts. Payable | | dmpage1@comcast.net |
| Diane Sonnenberg | Secretary | | dianesonnenberg@mac.com |
| Dr. Arthur Blecher | Rabbi | | ablecher@starpower.net |
| Rain Zohav | Education Director | | rainzohav@earthlink.net |
| Lynn Weinstein | Parent Coordinator | | crobnlynn@earthlink.net |
| Julie Zalkind | Membership/Past Pres. | | Juliehz@erols.com |
| Ken Jacobson | Program Chair | | kenjacobson@hotmail.com |
| Sheldon Hofferan | Liturgy Ctte./Past Pres. | | ibkoolpaw@yahoo.com |
| Mary Ellen Petrisko | Past President | | mpetrisko@tai.edu |
| Gail Gertner Shapkin | Events Coordinator | | ggertner6@hotmail.com |
| Ron Leve | Fundraising | | theron@comcast.net |
| Peggy Robin | Newsletter Editor | | probin@adlerrobin.com |
| David Elfin | Publicity Committee | | elfind@verizon.net |
| Josh Lubell | Social Action Committee | | JoshLubell@yahoo.com |
| Marji Ross | Music Committee | | mross@eaglepub.com |
| Beth Chai Answering Service/Email | Beth Chai Web Site | | www.bethchai.org ; info@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 Diane Page for assistance.

Every Little Bit Helps!

Thank You to Beth Chai for Katrina Tzedakah

by Rachel Feldman

Our Beth Chai community made a wonderful contribution to help house and welcome hurricane evacuees to the DC area over the last few months. One way our Sunday School community participated (both children and adults) was through the *tzedakah* collection taken each Sunday morning. Each small contribution links our children and adults to community action that provided benefits to people in need. On four Sundays, the *tzedakah* collection was donated to the hurricane evacuee project. These funds were used to purchase bedding and kitchen utensils for people as they moved out of shelters into apartments. Gift cards donated by the



children went to a family that needed quite a few medications and was waiting for their Medicaid and Medication Assistance to come through. Thanks to everyone who drops their spare change and dollar bills into the box each Sunday!

(Continued from front page)

Shabbat Service and Program Details

Schedule

7 to 8 PM: A buffet supper, costing \$10 per person and set out at 7, is an occasion for members and potential members to get better acquainted or caught up. Those wishing to join in for the meal are asked to sign up by contacting Ken Jacobson before noon on Thursday, February 9, either by phone at 202-462-2472 or email at kenjacobson@hotmail.com.

8 to 8:30 PM: Beth Chai's Shabbat service, which features a Humanistic Kiddush, thought-provoking readings, and opportunities to participate for children wishing to do so.

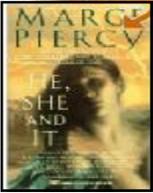
8:30 to 10 PM: Screening of *Uncle Moses*.

Location of all Beth Chai Shabbat programs
(unless otherwise indicated):
Beth Chai Congregation at River Road U.C.
Fireside Room - 2nd Floor
6301 River Road., Bethesda, MD
(Entrance to parking lot on Whittier Blvd.)

Program Notes for Adult Education - February 2006

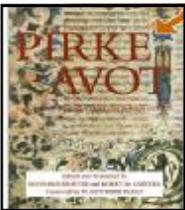
Jewish Feminist Philosophy, The Jewish Ethical Tradition

February 5: Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*. Education Director Rain Zohav will lead us in examining the ethical dilemmas and moral questions raised in this intriguing novel by a very popular radical Jewish feminist author. Rain will present work she herself has done investigating the novel in the light of Martha Nussbaum's advocacy of using literature for philosophic inquiries. In addition, she will introduce some of the feminist philosophies through which the many moral issues addressed in the novel can be understood, discussing Carol Gilligan's idea of an "ethics of care" in particular. Participants will have their own opportunity to investigate the characters in the novel, looking at how they act as models of various feminist philosophies. *He, She and It*, by Marge Piercy, (ISBN 0-449-22060-5; Amazon price: \$7.50).



Search New and Used
amazon.com.

Reading the book beforehand is recommended, although there should be enough people who have done so that others will be able to join in the proceedings and get caught up quickly. The book can be ordered through www.bethchai.org — click on "Beth Chai Books" on the left-hand column of site links and then find the "keyword" search box just above the Amazon logo on that page and type any identifying information about the book in that box (title, author, or ISBN number); press "go" and you will get to the book on Amazon.com and will be able to order it directly through Beth Chai's Amazon Associates account. A portion of the purchase price will benefit Beth Chai.



February 12 and 26: *Pirke Avot* — An Introduction to Jewish Ethics. Many are familiar with the story of how the ancient sage Hillel distilled the entire Torah into a phrase that could be recited while standing on one foot: "What is hateful to you, do not unto your fellow." Another of Hillel's sayings is a regular part of our services at Beth Chai: "If I am not for myself who will be for me, but if I am only for myself, what am I?" These famous maxims are part of a slender yet rich tractate of the *Mishnah* called *Pirke Avot*, "Sayings of the Ancestors." Assembled in the year 200, it became a venerated classic of Jewish ethical literature.

These two sessions, plus that on March 5, will be devoted to discussing a contemporary edition of *Pirke Avot* that combines an excellent English translation with both classical and contemporary commentaries. Those planning to attend are advised to pick up a copy of *Pirke Avot*; the edition recommended by Rabbi Art Blecher, who will lead the discussions, is *Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics*, edited and translated by Leonard Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky; ISBN 0-8074-0480-2; price: \$10.17. As with *He, She and It*, this book can be ordered online through the Beth Chai Books/Amazon link at www.bethchai.org/books.html. Just type the title or ISBN number in the "keywords" search box on that page, press "go" and you will arrive at that book via Beth Chai's Amazon Associates account. A portion of the purchase price will benefit Beth Chai.

Rabbi Blecher recommends that participants read the following chapters prior to the sessions:

February 12: Introduction; Chapter 1 – At Sinai Moses Received the Torah; Chapter 2 – Which Is the Proper Path?
February 26: Chapter 3 – Know Where You Came From, Know Where You are Going; Chapter 4 – Who Is Wise?
March 5: Chapter 5 – The World Was Created by Ten Statements; Chapter 6 – Whoever Studies the Torah for Its Own Sake

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(Chinese New Year Banquet — continued from front page)

If you have any questions about this long-running annual event, please ask an officer, as Sheldon will be researching his topic along the Silk Road until February 15.

Driving directions: The TemptAsian Café is at 6259 Little River Turnpike, immediately west of I-395 on the Annandale-Alexandria boundary. From I-395 (Shirley Highway), exit west on Rte. 236 (Little River Turnpike) towards Annandale, turn left at first traffic light (Beauregard St.), turn left into the first parking lot entrance. The restaurant is the first building on the left. The restaurant's phone number is 703-750-6801.



Letter from the Education Director — February 2006

Dear Congregants,



In lieu of a long article from me this month, I've asked several of the teachers to write up short reports of what they have been doing so far this year. Their reports follow. This month we meet on **February 6, 12, and 26**, and have off for President's Day weekend on February 19th. On February 12 many of the classes will be learning about **Tu B'Shevat – the Birthday of the Trees**. If anyone would like to do a Tu B'Shevat seder in their home, I would be happy to provide instructions and *haggadot* (service booklets). The holiday is officially on February 13.

*B'Shalom,
Rain Zohav*

The Mitzvah Class. The mitzvah class this year is exploring two critical concepts. In the Tikkun Olam part of our curriculum the key concept is that "Jewish tradition uniquely obliges us to have the courage (*ometz lev*) to pursue justice (*tzedek*) and compassion (*rachmanut*) in order to help repair the world (*tikkun olam*). We investigated the importance of *mitzvot* and are learning a myriad of them. We discussed our *tzedakah* (charity) project and decided to donate the funds we raise to Save the Rainforest. We talked about serious issues like the homeless and ways to identify and help them.

—*Jessica Rabinow, Mitzvah Class Co-Teacher (with Rabbi Art Blecher)*

Fifth/Sixth Grade. Our curriculum focuses on Jewish American history, starting in the 1400s when the first Jews traveled to America and continuing through the present day. The goals of this year are to foster a sense of connection to the Jewish people, a feeling of pride for Jewish accomplishment in this country, and to increase the understanding of Jewish values.

The initial weeks of the year were spent learning about the first Jews to travel to the Americas from Spain, fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. The class created a play depicting this journey and the challenges of adapting to a new culture. This production debuted to rave reviews in front of a packed audience of Adult Ed attendees.

Since then the class has dealt with a variety of topics including: life in the American Colonies, some of the earliest Jewish rabbis and community leaders, and the Jewish impact on the Civil War. The class has also gone on to learn about Jews in modern America, including Levi Strauss, Steven Spielberg, Albert Einstein, and several prominent Jewish athletes.

The 5th/6th grade class has many exciting projects coming up, the most popular of which may be recreating the first American synagogues ... with graham crackers and candy!

—*Matt Krouner, Fifth/Sixth Grade Teacher*

Fourth Grade. The fourth grade has learned a lot this year. These intelligent students have tackled difficult subjects, such as anti-Semitism, in both Eastern Europe and America. Focusing on the transition between life in the *shtetl*, the small Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and Russia in the mid to late 1800s, and life in the lower east side of Manhattan, upon immigration to the United States, we discuss the traditions many of our ancestors followed and how many of them have disappeared while others are still in practice today. We use the book *Call Me Ruth* to highlight the transition. Ruth, born Rivkah in Eastern Europe, immigrated to New York with her mother, changed her name to sound more American, and in the process, relinquished much of her old culture to fit in. We also watched *Fiddler on the Roof* in order to paint a clearer picture of what *shtetl* life was like, as well as witness the tragedy of the *pogrom*. Additionally, we are busy studying Hebrew, learning the letters of the aleph-bet as well as various Hebrew words that are associated with the Jewish holidays or Rain's words of the week. We have also discussed the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, our day of reflection and forgiveness, as well as Sukkot and Chanukah. (*Continued on p. 5*)

Rabbi's Message

As this newsletter is being assembled, two legal hearings have been in the national news: the Abramoff trial and the Alito confirmation. Obviously, the two proceedings are very different, just as the personalities of the two men and their professional histories are very different. Yet both arenas involve similar questions about whether power can be brokered and whether public officials can be insulated from private influence.



In the Torah, detailed passages lay out the structures of the new society the Jewish People were to establish after they settled in the land of Canaan. The text states that judges and public officials must not accept payments, because payments cloud the vision of those who dispense justice. The usual interpretation of this commandment is simply that Jewish Law forbids bribery, but the ancient rabbinic tradition saw it differently.

During Judaism's rabbinic period, the rabbis became the judges of Judea. Public and private transactions were regulated by the rabbinic courts. However, the law prohibited rabbis and judges from receiving any kind of payments for their services, including salaries. Teachers and judges of Jewish Law were expected to volunteer their time in the academies and the courts. Their livelihoods had to come from their personal resources, their businesses and their trades, so that financial considerations would not influence their decisions.

Of course, ancient Judea was a different time and place: pre-industrial and pre-capitalist. Nonetheless, Jewish Law was struggling with the same issues as we are today: How does an enlightened society assemble itself? Can we entrust the administering of society to individuals who as humans are already part of the same society? Once society gives power to its officials, does that power shift to the governors or is it retained by the people? Can individuals who are given authority ever transcend their essential human dependence on other human beings?

Jewish Law's principle of a volunteer government may not be practical for a modern nation like the United States. However, Jewish Law's principle of the insulation of power from influence is very much the issue that we must resolve today.

—*Dr. Arthur C. Blecher*

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(Class Reports, continued from previous page)

In the coming months, we will discuss rise of the labor unions and the prominent role Jews played in that effort. We will also discuss Zionism, the belief in maintaining a Jewish homeland in Israel, and its early leaders, like Theodore Herzl. The fourth graders are enthusiastic and passionate about learning and will undoubtedly continue to be as we tackle new topics in the coming months.

¾Allie Friedman, Fourth Grade Teacher

Second/Third Grade. Wow, the first half of the school year has flown by in the 2nd and 3rd grade classroom. First of all, let me introduce myself. I'm Josh Fine and I'm a senior at American University studying History and Secondary Education. I've absolutely loved the experience of teaching at Beth Chai and have found your children to be very bright and friendly. So far we have had units on all of the major holidays, the Jewish Patriarchs, and the concept of Tikkun Olam. In addition, each Sunday we add a new Hebrew letter to our growing vocabulary. During our activity time, the children have made their own desert huts, eaten graham cracker menorahs, and even held a canned food drive for the less fortunate. After each unit to ensure that the students understand the information we play a game show that quizzes them in a fun and entertaining manner. (So far we've played Jeopardy and the Family Feud.) As we move ahead we will study the importance of Shabbat and explore the role of women in Biblical history. If at any time you have any questions feel free to stop by the classroom and talk to me. I hope everyone is having a great start to their New Year and I look forward to seeing everyone on Sunday!

—*Josh Fine, Second/Third Grade Teacher*

Calendar of Events

| Date & Time | Event | Location |
|--|---|--|
| Sun., Feb. 5 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed. | Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: <i>He, She, and It</i> book discussion, led by Rain Zohav. | Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda |
| Fri., Feb. 10 at 8 PM; light supper begins at 7 PM | Shabbat service & program: <i>Uncle Moses</i> , Yiddish movie, will be shown. See front page for details. | Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, Fireside Rm., 2nd fl., 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier) |
| Sun., Feb. 12 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed. | Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: <i>Pirke Avot</i> , an introduction to Jewish ethics, led by Rabbi Blecher (part 1 of 3 parts). | Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda |
| Sat., Feb. 18 at 7:30 PM | Beth Chai's annual Chinese New Year's Banquet, including-talk by Sheldon Hofferan on "Jews and the Asian Silk Road." See front page article for reservation info. & cost. | TemptAsian Café, 6259 Little River Tnpk. (in the Grand Mart Shopping Plaza), Alexandria, VA 22312, tel. 703-750-6801. |
| Sun., Feb. 19 | NO SCHOOL - Presidents' Day weekend. | |
| Sun., Feb. 26 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed. | Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: <i>Pirke Avot</i> , an introduction to Jewish ethics, led by Rabbi Blecher (part 2 of 3 parts). | Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda |
| Sun., Feb. 26, from 7 to 9 PM | Beth Chai board meeting. All interested members are welcome to attend. | Home of Julie & David Zalkind in N. Arlington. Call 703-522-1023 or email juliehz@erols.com to RSVP and get directions. |
| Sun., Mar. 26 at 10:00 AM for students and bidders (8:30 AM for set-up volunteers) | Beth Chai's Big AUCTION! See front page for article. Continuing news to come in the weekly emails and in next month's issue of this newsletter. | Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda |



Beth Chai Congregation

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