



BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

February Adult Ed:

Judaism Meets Islam

'The Rabbi in America' concludes

February 4: The Rabbi in America – Part III.

In the finale of a three-part series on the evolving role of the American rabbi, Beth Chai's own rabbi, Art Blecher, will talk about the challenges faced by rabbis in the current era of innovation and diversity that began with the 1970s revival of Jewish interest.

Among the topics addressed will be: how well formal training prepares rabbis to serve the congregations that employ them; the attitudes of rabbis of the various denominations toward sharing the Jewish knowledge they have acquired; and the public postures assumed by rabbis in dealing with their congregants, their colleagues, and the wider world.

February 11: Judaism Meets Islam, Part I – People of the Book.

Beth Chai Rabbi Art Blecher and member **Karim Chaibi**, who holds a degree in Islamic theology, will embark on a multi-part exploration of similarities and differences between the two traditions as belief systems and guides for living.

(Continued on Page 5)

Shabbat Service and Program:

Lithuania's Wooden Synagogues: An Artist's Perspective

Friday, February 23.

Fabulous wooden synagogues constructed between the 17th century and the early 20th century once dotted the landscape of Europe. Today only 23 remain, eight of them in Lithuania. Beth Chai member **Joyce Ellen Weinstein**, an artist and author, has traveled to remote Lithuanian villages to visit these structures and will share the fruits of her research: photographs



Drawing by Joyce Ellen Weinstein

of them, original artworks inspired by them, historical documents, and memories imparted by those still living near them.

(See Page 7 for Schedule & location)

It's Chinese New Year's Time Again!

Sunday, February 18 at 12 noon.

Our annual Beth Chai Chinese New Year's celebration will bring in the Year of the Pig (well, we're equal opportunity celebrators) at a new location, the acclaimed **Hong Kong Palace** at 6387 Leesburg Pike at Seven Corners in Falls Church, VA. No stairs and free parking right outside!!

This year we will partake of an interesting and delicious new ten-course Szechuan (spicy but not necessarily hot) banquet, followed by a short presentation by Sheldon Hofferan on how a Jewish family made a fortune in China and changed history in the process.

The cost for Beth Chai members and their guests is only \$30 per person, tax and tip included, and reservations must be prepaid. 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 it to:

Sheldon Hofferan
PO Box 350
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-0350

Checks must arrive by February 16. If you have any questions about this long-running annual event, please contact Sheldon at 703-323-1885 or ibkoolpaw@yahoo.com.

Beth Chai Directory

Position	Name (* = Board Member)	Telephone	Email
Rabbi	Dr. Arthur Blecher	202-462-5448	ablecher@starpower.net
Education Director	Rain Zohav	301-294-8849	rainzohav@earthlink.net
President	Deborah Signer Balaschak*	301-897-4909	balasig@verizon.net
Vice President	Mike Wexler*	202-237-1216	ela.mike@verizon.net
Secretary/Past President	Suzanne Greenfield*	202-537-0142	greenfieldshapiro@msn.com
Treasurer	Ilene Sokolsky*	301-587-1309	i.sokolsky@verizon.net
Fundraising Chair	Ron Leve*	202-496-9292	theron@comcast.net
Liturgy Co-Chair	Sheldon Hofferan.	703-323-1885	ibkoolpaw@yahoo.com
Liturgy Co-Chair	Rob Weinstein*	301-215-6445	crobnlynn@earthlink.net
Membership Co-Chair	Reed Dewey	301-718-0262	reed-dewey@verizon.net
Membership Co-Chair	Julie Zalkind	703-522-1023	julieh@erols.com
Music Chair	Marji Ross	703-917-0590	mross@eaglepub.com
Program Co-Chair	Ken Jacobson	301-920-2094	kenjacobson@hotmail.com
Program Co-Chair	Andrew Strongin*	301-585-4428	astrongin@starpower.net
Publicity	Vacant		
Social Action Chair	Howie Feinstein*	301-564-9482	khfeinstein@us.net
Bookkeeper/Accounts Payable	Diane Page	703-534-5839	dmpage1@comcast.net
Correspondent	Elizabeth Mumford	301-656-6124	eam222@verizon.net
Email Announcements	Julie Vigdor	202-537-1001	julievigdor@yahoo.com
Newsletter Editor (Text)	Gail Greenberg	301-593-1247	gailjgreenberg@comcast.net
Newsletter Editor (Layout)	Walter Scott	301-294-8849	walter_scott@mindspring.com
Parent Council Coordinator	Lisa Spain	240-632-9239	pansi1213@yahoo.com
Sunday School Volunteer Coordinator	Lynn Weinstein	301-215-6445	crobnlynn@earthlink.net
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

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.

Stand Up and Stand-In for Darfur



The local Darfur Advocacy Committee is sponsoring a weekly vigil at the Embassy of Sudan to protest the genocide in Darfur. This takes place each Wednesday from 12 to 1 PM in front of the Embassy at 2210 Massachusetts Avenue, just three blocks from the Dupont Circle Metro stop. We who live in the Washington area are privileged to be able to personally participate in these protests and have a responsibility to stand-in for the thousands elsewhere in the country who, but for distance, would be grateful for the opportunity that we have. Please show your support by dedicating an hour for this purpose. For further information contact Ron Leve (202-496-9292, TheRon@comcast.net)

Rabbi's Message



Judaism in America Today — Part I

American Judaism was born out of the historical events of the twentieth century and the emotional upheaval of a transplanted population. However, the religion I want to discuss here is not the formal Judaism of rabbis or the official Judaism of denominations. It is not the Judaism that is described in classrooms or discussed in textbooks. Rather it is the constellation of concepts and practices at work within the American Jewish community today. Most of those elements overlap with formal Judaism. Others – though not discussed with the same reverence - are vivid and powerful aspects of contemporary Jewish contemporary civilization. Some of the beliefs that comprise how American Jews understand their history and identity are factual, while others are fictional. But each of them makes a statement about the essential world view of Judaism in America today.

It is a fiction that Judaism is four thousand years old, for the religious practices and beliefs of the ancient Hebrews bear very little resemblance to the Jewish religion today. On the other hand, it is a fact that American Jews venerate their ancestors and that they practice a form of mysticism where every ritual points back in time to the origins of the Jewish people. The patriarchs and matriarchs of the stories in Genesis are Judaism's liturgical icons. Though no statues represent them in any synagogue, their spirits are invoked during every prayer service: "Blessed are You, Lord, our God and God of our ancestors; God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob"

For most American Jews today, religious observance has far more to do with reverence for the generations that have gone before than with obedience to God's commandments. Jews do not recite prayers as much in the sense of speaking to God as in the spirit of tending the fire of an altar built at the beginning of history.

References to the ancestors are central to every ritual within Judaism. Passover matzah is the "bread of suffering our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." Circumcision is the "Covenant of Abraham." Moses and David are *ushpizin*, "invited guests" during the festival of Sukkot. The ancestors are a powerful presence throughout Judaism's ceremonial life.

Although the textbooks declare that the Sabbath is Judaism's most sacred time, far more Jews attend services on the High Holy Days than on any other occasion. Synagogues across America are filled beyond capacity during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but not necessarily because Jews want to honor a new liturgical year or observe a day of atonement. Most Jews come to services on those days to connect with the Jewish community during a significant time -- or to say Kaddish.

The practice of reciting this Aramaic chant in honor of the dead began well after the period of the Second Temple, when Jews no longer spoke Hebrew. The words themselves have nothing to do with death, but the consonance and the cadence of the phrases make Kaddish a prayer of mourning: *yit-ga-dal vi-yit-ka-dash vi-yit-ba-rakh vi-yish-ta-bakh vi-yit-pa-ar vi-yit-ro-mam vi-yit-na-sey vi-yit-ha-dar vi-yit-a-leh vi-yit-ha-lal*

By tradition, Kaddish is recited in memory of a parent or a child, a sibling or a spouse. As a result, although it is not officially recognized as such, saying Kaddish for the first time is a sacred life-cycle event. It is the American Jew's real coming-of-age, when the individual joins the congregation of those who have experienced profound loss. Most people enter this holy place when well into middle age, after a mother or father has passed away, though of course some come there sooner.

Another religious practice, nearly universal among American Jews, underscores the importance Judaism places on the memory of forebears: the custom of giving "Jewish" names to children in addition to their regular names. Most often these are Hebrew names, though sometimes they are Yiddish. Some American Jews never have occasion to use their Hebrew names at all, and a few may not even remember what name they were given. But most American Jews – whether practicing Judaism or not -- have a second, religious name in honor of a family member they never knew and – in theory – a direct ancestor from the beginnings of the Jewish people. Like saying Kaddish for parents, giving Hebrew names to children is a sign of the sacredness of Judaism's ancestors.

Thoughts about ancestors lead to thoughts about descendents and to the expectation that future generations will maintain the chain of tradition. I will address this important concept in next month's column.

RABBI ARTHUR BLECHER

Letter from the Education Director - February 2007



Dear Congregants,

In February, we celebrate Tu B'Shevat – the birthday of the trees. This ancient holiday, which marked the time of the year to count a tree's age for tithing purposes, has evolved over the centuries. The mystics in Sefat wrote a Tu B'Shevat seder during which they drank four cups of wine and ate three categories of fruit. Since the founding of the modern state of Israel, the holiday has been revised again, to include the planting of trees. And in our contemporary times, we have added an environmental dimension to the holiday.



*The Davises, Acrylic/mixed media on canvas,
by Marilyn Banner*

I had been planning to do a Tu B'Shevat seder for K – 3rd grade students and their parents; however, I realized that would necessitate moving Adult Ed out of the social hall twice in the month of February, which is just too much. Perhaps next year, if there is interest, we can have Tu B'Shevat seders in homes.

The one time this month we are asking adult education participants to meet in the media center is on Feb.25, in order to have the 4th grade and up Family Collage project with guest artist Marilyn Banner in the social hall. The younger classes and their parents thoroughly enjoyed this program when they participated in December. All families should begin to prepare for this now. Find photos of your immediate and extended family, and ancestors. Make photocopies, or print outs of pictures you might want to include in a family collage. From 5 – 20 pictures should give you enough to choose from. Black and white and color are both fine. You also might want multiple copies of one picture, to give a special effect to your collage. Beth Chai will provide paper and other mixed media materials for you and

your student to create a lasting memory of your family. We need families to bring scissors.

Marilyn will share some of her mixed media work of her family and ancestors to set the stage for us to use our imaginations also. This program is made possible by a generous grant from the **Jewish Federation of Greater Washington**. Adults who would like to try their hand at a collage are welcome to join us. Since the main images of the collage will be photographs, you do not need to be able to draw to create something of beauty and interest. Marilyn will be coaching people on elements of composition to enhance their work. If you would like to learn more about this wonderful local Jewish artist and her work, you can go to her website at: <http://marilynbanner.com>.

We will not be meeting on President's Day weekend. Enjoy the break!

*B'Shalom,
Rain Zohav*



Hold The Dates!

Saturday, April 7th
from 5 to 8 pm
Beth Chai & River Road UC's annual
Joint Community Seder

Saturday, April 28th at 3 pm, to
Sunday, April 29th at 4 pm
First time ever

Congregational Retreat

More details to follow!

Fabulous Annual Beth Chai Auction Not Far Away

Yes, that time of year is quickly upon us. On March 11, 2007 we will be holding the Annual Beth Chai auction at Burning Tree Elementary from 10 AM until noon. Due to the vagaries of the timing of the Newsletter, this will be the primary notice in this medium for this event.

You should be thinking of what you can donate for the silent and live auctions. As you'll recall, we had an amazing array of wonderful items that had been donated for the auction, by both Beth Chai members and outside organizations. Here are some possibilities, but don't let this limit you. I'll bet that many of you have new and exciting ideas.

Our Beth Chai gatherings not only raise funds, but more importantly, they promote a sense of community by enabling folks to get together in smaller groups outside the regular schedule. Last year there were a variety of dinners, tours at the Library of Congress and games' nights.

- ✧ Daniel Korn's special interest attracted lots of bidders for his Scottish Highlands Whiskey tasting. And finally, those of you with young children might find creating events a great way to get together.
- ✧ How about some of those skills that you have, related to either your job or a special interest? Could you help someone with their investments, taxes or provide legal consultation? Lots of folks could use help with specialized household chores or repairs.

- ✧ Others probably would be interested in learning some skill or hobby that you have, ranging from knitting to cooking.
- ✧ You probably patronize local shops or restaurants that could donate a tangible item or gift certificate. After all, that's how we got a nearly 2000 year-old piece of Roman glass last year.
- ✧ There's probably something that you own, make or could share with others. This might be a piece of art, a vacation home or tickets for the performing arts.

I encourage all of to take a look at last year's catalog on the Beth Chai website, www.bethchai.org. (From the main page, click on the last item in the list of links on the left.) And, please, especially new members, talk with Ron Leve or Julie Zalkind if you have any questions or thoughts about donations. Lest you forget, many of your donations might be tax deductible.

Of course, the auction itself is a great social occasion for all who attend. You are welcome to invite friends, family and neighbors to join us. A special feature of the day is the Beth Chai Café where all sorts of goodies will be available. Many are made by our members, so you might start thinking of something that you might bring.

For further information, contact Ron Leve (202-496-9292, TheRon@comcast.net) or Julie Zalkind (703-522-1023, juliez@comcast.net)

Judaism Meets Islam during February Adult Ed

(Continued from Front Page)

In this first session, they will talk about the parallel relationship of the two religions to a founding text that is attributed to a divine author and was transmitted through a single prophet. The implications of this relationship for the character of each religion and culture will be addressed, with special attention given to the role of textual interpretation. Each speaker will make a separate presentation on his own tradition, with general discussion to follow.

Sunday, February 25: Judaism Meets Islam, Part II – Prophecy and Statecraft. In the second of a multi-part exploration of the two traditions, Rabbi Art Blecher and Beth Chai member Karim Chaibi will look at the meaning of Moses' and Muhammad's contrasting fates: the latter founded and ruled a state, while the former was kept from even entering the Promised Land.



Each speaker will talk about the connection between religious authority and the exercise of temporal power in his own tradition, as well as the consequences of this link for both religious and political life. General discussion will follow.

A Busy Year for Beth Chai Social Action

The generosity of Beth Chai's members was demonstrated once again this year, as record donations were made to Jewish Social Services Agency (High Holidays collection) and Latino Transitional Housing Partnership (Help-the-Homeless Mini-Walk). We are talking with representatives from the Latino Transitional Housing Project concerning additional services which we may be able to provide for them.

Our new Anti-Discrimination Project began by giving legal advice and a letter of support from Rabbi Blecher to Zion Baptist Church in Charles County, MD. This predominantly African-American church was the victim of racist vandalism, including "KKK" graffiti. We also contributed funds and supporting letters from our Family School children to the Washington Area Jewish Council for the Aging, following repeated vandalism of JCA's bus fleet. Several of the Family School children's letters were published in JCA's newsletter. Please notify Social Action Chair Howard Feinstein (khfeinstein@us.net / 301-564-9482) promptly if you become aware of any incidents involving discrimination or exclusionist behavior in which Beth Chai may wish to become involved.

We have continued to take stands on issues of humanitarianism and human rights. Initiated by Sheldon Hofferman, members continue to pressure Sudan, American authorities, and international organizations to take steps to stop the genocide in Darfur. Our members have participated in a weekly vigil (every Wednesday, Noon – 1:00 pm) at the Embassy of The Sudan, 2210 Massachusetts Ave., NW, DC. The Beth Chai Board also unanimously endorsed a statement opposing the use of torture, calling upon the United States and all countries to treat detainees humanely. Again, contact the Social Action Chair with any proposed statements or actions relevant to current issues.



The Social Action Committee has begun steps to initiate several direct services projects in which members can provide assistance to deserving individuals and organizations. As noted above, discussions continue with LTHP to formulate a plan to continue and expand our association with that organization.

We were recently approached by Open Arms Housing, Inc., a non-profit organization currently renovating a Capitol Hill apartment building which will house 16 mentally-ill, formerly homeless women. Once this facility opens in the fall, a broad range of direct services will be available for Beth Chai volunteers. During the renovation period, Open Arms urgently needs assistance in getting out their newsletter. Anyone with graphics/production experience should contact the Social Action Chair.



Volunteers are also needed to participate in the various programs of the Jewish Foundation for Group Homes. This organization runs 21 small group homes throughout the Washington area. The residents are approximately 70% Jewish, with a wide variety of backgrounds, ages, needs, disabilities, etc. The residents are in need of discussion leaders, art and creative writing instruction, field trips to community events, etc. Any member wishing to explore volunteer participation should contact the Social Action Chair, and I will connect you with Linda Yitzchak of JFGHG; their website, www.jfgh.org is very informative.

Please remember that Social Action is a democratic effort at Beth Chai – all ideas, and additional Social Action Committee members are welcome. Consistent with Beth Chai's mission statement, we view social action as integral, not collateral, to Beth Chai's fundamental purpose.

Thank you,

Howard Feinstein
Social Action Chair

February 2007 Shabbat Services and Programs

(continued from front page article)

Shabbat Schedule, Friday, February 23rd

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, February 22, either by email at theron@comcast.net or by phone at 202-496-9292.

8-8:30 pm: Beth Chai's Shabbat service, which features a humanistic Kiddush, thought-provoking readings, and roles for children wishing to participate, begins at around 8.

8:30-9:45 pm: A journey into Lithuania's past.



Drawing by Joyce Ellen Weinstein

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

Hanukah Party and the First Annual Latke-Hamantash Debate

Beth Chai celebrated Hanukah 2006 (or 5767) in grand style, with wonderful food brought by our members and plentiful and delicious latkes professionally prepared so as to save our dedicated volunteers frying time and oil splatters. Beth Chai members brought their own menorahs from home and all together we blessed the multitudinous candles and sang Hanukah songs. Tracey Goldman did a beautiful job of storytelling, leading the kids in song, and organizing an arts and crafts project. The older children played dreidel and were supervised by Lynn Weinstein and Sara Duke. While we celebrate Hanukah together every year, this special celebration was also a thank you to previous board members, to acknowledge their dedicated service on behalf of us all.



Illustration of the theory of Stoval Warming, by Joanna Joiner, 'Institute for Advanced Foods Studies'

But wait! That's not all! Beth Chai's first annual Latke/Hamantash debate, held at the end of the party, offered hilarious arguments in favor of the latke or the hamantash (or some variation on that theme) from eight Beth Chai members. Ken Jacobson, Joanna Joiner, Josh Lubell, Mary Ellen Petrisko, Mark Shmueli, Lisa Spain, Walter Scott, and Mike Wexler gave presentations inspired by their own professional disciplines, moderated by Mark Balaschak. From holes in the clotheszone and stoval warming to the molecular structure of latkes and hamantashen, the presentations provided inspired material that occasioned the comment to at least one of the presenters, "I never knew you were so funny!"

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this great event!

Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sun. Feb. 4 at 9:30 AM for students, 10AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School, pre-K. Adult Ed topic: "The Rabbi in America – Part III." led by Rabbi Art Blecher. See front page article.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. Feb. 11 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School, pre-K. Adult Ed topic: "Judaism Meets Islam, Part I – People of the Book." See front page article.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. Feb. 18	No Sunday School or Adult Ed – President's Day Weekend	
Sun. Feb 18 at noon	Beth Chai's annual Chinese New Year's Banquet including a talk by Sheldon Hofferan. See front page article for reservation info & cost.	Hong Kong Palace, 6387 Leesburg Pike at Seven Corners, Falls Church, VA
Fri., Feb. 23 at 8 PM, light supper at 7 PM.	Shabbat Service & Program– Beth Chai member Joyce Ellen Weinstein. "Lithuania's Wooden Synagogues: An Artist's Perspective." See front page article.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, Fire-side Room on second floor. 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sun. Feb. 25 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School arts program with artist Marilyn Banner. Adult Ed topic: "Judaism Meets Islam, Part II – Prophecy and Statecraft." See article on page 5.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. Feb. 25 from 7-9 PM	Beth Chai board meeting. All interested members are welcome to attend.	Home of Deborah and Mark Balaschak. To RSVP and get directions, email balasig@verizon.net or call (301) 897-4909.
Sun. Mar. 11 from 10-11 AM for students	Sunday School. Annual Beth Chai auction. No Adult Education. See article on page 5.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda



Beth Chai Congregation

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

Answering service: 301-229-7400

Email: info@bethchai.org

Website: www.bethchai.org

Address Correction Requested

