



BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

Auction Time Is Here Again

Finally, the announcement you've been plowing through every newsletter looking for: It's time to get ready for the 2009 Beth Chai auction!

You've probably been wondering, "What can I do to help?" We're so glad you asked.

Social Action Committee Sets New Priorities

Beth Chai's social action committee met in December to accomplish two immediate tasks:

- to revise our priorities to meet the growing need for food in the greater community due to the economic downturn and
- to explore ways of broadening social action participation in the congregation.

The committee decided to expand on our current food donation programs in the following ways:

We will collect canned and other nonperishable foods for donation to the Jewish Social Services Agency at each monthly Shabbat dinner at RRUUC. We already collect food and pharmacy items for JSSA during the High Holidays, and JSSA has accelerated its program to deliver more food to those in need in the metropolitan area.

Beth Chai currently delivers sandwiches to Martha's Table in Washington in the spring on our community work day. We will now also do this one Sunday each month, after Sunday school, at members' homes. Please contact Sara Duke (saraduke1@verizon.net) or Howard Feinstein (khfeinstein@verizon.net) if you can host a sandwich-making get-together (we would like to have several sites, spread out geographically, on one Sunday each month).

(continued on page 2)

First of all, think about what you would like to donate. In the past, members have donated jewelry, books, toys, and objects d'art to name a few.

Others have donated a week or more at vacation homes, tickets to sporting events, or theatre tickets. Some members have used their expertise to guide tours.

Many members have donated social functions with a theme—play readings, cheese tastings, wine tastings, game nights, and so on. Members with musical talents have auctioned themselves for parties. And those with culinary talents have offered up cakes, soups, or other tasty delights.

Your imagination is the only limit. Please get in touch with Julie Zalkind (julie@hzmgt.com) to discuss your donations.

"That's easy," you must be saying, "Don't you have more I can do?" Of course! We still need volunteers to solicit and pick up donations from community sources. We need you to ask people you know who might be able to donate an auction item. And we need writers to put together descriptions for the auction catalog. Also, volunteers are needed to assist on auction day tasks.

If you are interested in helping, and we see that you are, please contact Karen Feinstein at 301-564-9482 or khfeinstein@verizon.net

Now you're likely saying to yourself, "I need to get that on my calendar!" You're right, so save the date: This year's annual auction will be on Sunday, March 15.

—Julie Zalkind



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	mbaumana@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.

(Social Action Priorities continued from page 1)

We will also have sandwich-making stations at special events—an effort that began with a wildly successful undertaking at last month's Chanukah party (see page 5), and will continue on Purim and additional days. We will also talk with to RRUUC about co-hosting sandwich-making days.

Another new program the group decided to embark upon is a project to make afghans, shawls, blankets, and the like to benefit various community organizations. See the story on page 5 for details.

While the congregation will concentrate on alleviating the

effects of the economic situation during the coming year, we will also keep apprised of major human rights and “safety net” issues that may arise. Mark Israel will monitor these areas.

Other social action activities, including our relationship with the Latino Transitional Housing Partnership and our anti-discrimination project, will continue.

All members are strongly encouraged to participate in social action, a central mission of Beth Chai. Contact Chair Howard Feinstein at khfeinstein@verizon.net for additional information.

—Howie Feinstein

Message From the Rabbi

In recent years, Jews across the country—and spanning the spectrum of Jewish life from Orthodox to Humanistic—have become very enthusiastic about reading classical texts, both Biblical and Rabbinic. I think there are three factors motivating this renewed interest in ancient writings.

The first is that the various materials in the Hebrew Bible are actually the oldest known cultural artifacts of Jewish civilization. Whether or not every individual story in the Bible actually took place as described, they do nonetheless reveal the daily life and emotional world of our ancestors. They describe a real civilization no less than does a fragment of pottery or a papyrus document. While Jews have few if any physical artifacts of our cultural origins, the fascinating material in the Bible is both varied and rich.

Second, the vast rabbinic literature, compiled over a thousand-year period beginning a few centuries before the Common Era, records the daily workings of Judean society. More than that, it documents the moral, intellectual, and legal principles that determined the course of Jewish history. The voluminous pages of the Midrash and Talmud contain the central concepts that informed the decisions of Judea's leaders as they confronted conquering empires and internal factions. The patterns of thinking in these works may seem quaint to many of us today, but they were the forces behind fierce civil wars, bloody revolutions and devastating destruction.

Finally, to my great dismay, religious and political factions in the United States routinely invoke “The “Bible” as authority for legislative policy. I believe this wrong. And I think it's a corruption of this country's historical values. Nonetheless, because Americans are engaged in a culture war that has serious implications for everyone, all Americans need to be informed about what is—and what isn't—in the Bible.

I will discuss these issues in greater depth as part of our Sunday adult education programs on Jan. 11 and Jan. 25.

With best wishes for the New Year,

Rabbi Art Blecher



January Shabbat: Loving One's Neighbor in the Jewish Tradition

The obligation to love one's neighbor as oneself is a value shared by many traditions. What does the Jewish tradition have to say about this? How important does Jewish tradition consider it to be? What does our tradition mean by “love”? How do we define “neighbor”? What are the obstacles to living by this principle? What would doing so look like?

Explore these questions and more at our next Shabbat dinner program, to be held **Friday, Jan. 23**, at Beth Chai Congregation at River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Road, Bethesda (entrance to parking lot from Whittier Blvd.).

Beth Chai Education Director Rain Zohav will talk about simple first steps toward loving our neighbors, along with Talmudic commentary on the issue and its contemporary applications. We will also discuss our personal experiences in this area.

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 of 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-floor 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, Jan. 22. 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): Talking about the “Golden Rule” will not require standing on one foot.

—Ken Jacobson.



Notes From the Education Director

Dear Congregants,

Back by popular request: On Sunday, Jan. 25, from noon to 12:30 at Burning Tree, we will host a Jewish summer camp fair, with representatives from several local Jewish camps here to answer questions. Many thanks to Eric London for organizing this again. At a recent retreat for Rabbinic students, I was reminded again how often Jewish summer camps offer transformative experiences in the lives of young Jews. Many of my fellow students shared experiences that had stayed with them in deep and meaningful ways from their Jewish summer camps. Several of our Beth Chai students went to various camps last summer that they learned about at our fair and seemed to have had a very good time! And to make it even more enticing, the Greater Washington Jewish Federation offers small incentive scholarships for first-time overnight campers to Jewish camps. Applications are available online at www.shalomdc.org/camperquest.

Don't forget that there will be no Sunday school on Jan. 4. Classes will begin again on Jan. 11.

On Sunday, Jan. 18, all of our classes will focus on building the "beloved community" of Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision and will explore how that vision ties into Jewish values. The students will meet in their classes for age-appropriate activities. Our social action chair, Howie Feinstein, has arranged for another great adult ed program in honor of Dr. King. (See page 7 for details.) Post-Mizvah students are highly encouraged to attend.

Please try to be on time for music assembly every Sunday. Come on in, sit up front, so folks who come later can find a seat, and help us start the day in song. As we grow, the disruptions also grow from latecomers, as well as folks visiting with each other along the sides of the room. In all the years that Philip has been leading songs for us, I have never heard him ask people to be quiet until this year.. This coming-together at the beginning of the day is a precious time, where parents, teachers, and children can learn with each other. Let's all be mindful of how to assist this process.

Another part of our morning together is our tzedakah collection. A few people have asked about my goals for this part of assembly. My first two goals are somewhat intertwined. I want our students to become habituated (in a very Aristotelian meaning of the word) to giving and to understand that giving is an integral part of living Jewishly. Our Mitzvah class students start out their Tikkun Olam unit with a survey of the table of contents and indexes from a wide variety of Jewish books on ethics from all the streams of Judaism. Their goal is to see which of the Jewish values that they will be studying are most mentioned. Invariably, tzedakah is included in every book.

I also have the goal of keeping the process of suggesting worthy organizations open to the community. I think that different people are aware of different needs in our world and I want our students to understand that we have responsibilities to help a wide circle of causes, from Jews and neighbors to strangers, other species, and the environment that we all share. I try to suggest some organizations that are Jewish that people in the congregation might not be aware of, as Beth Chai is the only Jewish home for many of us. If I have a bias, it tends to be for smaller, less well-known organizations where our small donations have a chance of making a larger impact. I try to find some kind of balance between all the various needs. I encourage parents to discuss the tzedakah choices with their students on the drive home. Or see if they would like to make a suggestion on the way to school. The more participation the better.

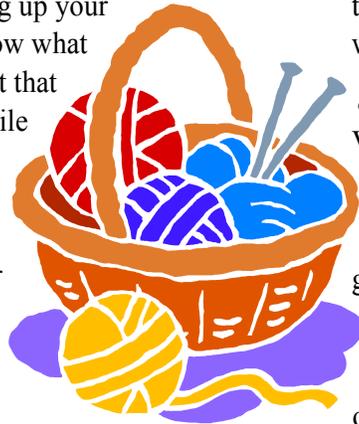
As we enter the depths of winter, I would like to remind folks that in case of snow, Sunday school will be cancelled if Montgomery County is closed. In addition, depending on conditions throughout the region and at Burning Tree, we may cancel school even if the county is not closed. I usually wait until the last possible moment to decide if the situation is iffy. Your room parents will either email or phone you if we decide to close. To check whether Montgomery County has closed school buildings, you can go to www.montgomerycountymd.gov or www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/emergency or call 240-777-2706. But let's hope it only snows on weekdays in January!

B'Shalom,

Rain Zohav

Members Unite to Make Afghans Are You a Knitter or Crocheter in Need of a Project?

Have you been thinking about picking up your needles or hooks again, but don't know what to make? Do you need a small project that you can take with you to work on while you're waiting at a child's lesson/game/rehearsal, riding the Metro, or waiting for an appointment? Are you tired of making scarves? Then knit or crochet a square, or two, or three, or as many as you'd like for a Beth Chai afghan!



Flora Wolf and Julie Vigdor are organizing an effort to knit/crochet squares that will be stitched together into an afghan for a charitable organization.

Here's how it works:

- Knit or crochet in any pattern you like. Here's a good chance to try something new or different.
- Use any yarn, as long as it's a worsted (medium) weight—a great opportunity to use up some of the yarn that's been sitting in your stash (which of course, allows you to then buy new yarn for your stash!). Use as many or as few colors as you'd like.
- Finished squares need to be 10 in. x 10 in.
- Make your square(s) at home, or while you're listening

JCC College Fair Explores Jewish Life on Campus

Sunday, March 15, is the 13th Annual CollegeQuest College Fair at the JCC of Greater Washington in Rockville. Students in grades 9 -11 and their families will hear from experts on college selection, special programs, and Jewish life on campus. They will also have the opportunity to ask questions of representatives from colleges and universities from across the nation. (More than 60 schools participated in 2008.)

For further details or to register go to www.jccgw.org and click on Special Events or call Tracy Schneidkraut at 301-348-3889.

to adult ed, or on the metro, or in a waiting room – anywhere, anytime.

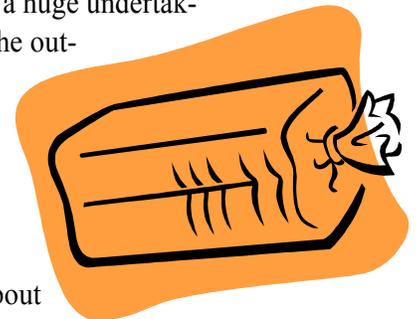
- Completed squares will be collected by Julie Vigdor and Flora Wolf.
- When we have enough, we'll stitch them together and pick an organization to donate the completed afghan to (some ideas are Children's Hospital, an overseas orphanage, or Habitat for Humanity).

Questions? Contact Flora Wolf (florakw@verizon.net or 301-598-5807) or Julie Vigdor (julievigdor@yahoo.com or 202-537-1001).

No questions? Pick out your yarn and pattern and get started!

Sandwich Appreciation

Thank you to everyone at Beth Chai who helped with the peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich-making station at our Chanukah party. It was a huge undertaking—especially given the outpouring of donations from our congregation—but the results were well worth the effort.



Our volunteers made about 650 sandwiches before we simply ran out of time and had to pack up. Special appreciation goes to Michele McNally Sturm, who oversaw the sandwich-making project with the help of Mitzvah class students and their families, and to Tracey Goldman and Andrew Strongin and family, who helped deliver the sandwiches.

The sandwiches, along with dozens of bags of bread and many jars of peanut butter and jelly, were donated to Martha's Table in Washington and Shepherd's Table in Silver Spring. Both organizations were very grateful.

This could never have happened without the generous efforts of so many in our congregation. Thank you!



President's Report

I attended an area-wide meeting of congregational leaders sponsored by the Jewish Federation on Dec. 11.

The first half of the meeting concerned the economic crisis and how it's affecting the area's Jewish community (and this was before it was revealed that the Federation had lost \$10 million it had invested with alleged swindler Bernard Madoff).

The Federation has started a special assistance phone number, the Warm Line (1-866-950-4243), and a \$300,000 Community Crisis Assistance Fund to help those in the community with such pressing needs as mortgage payments and rental, utility, and medical payments, as well as vocational and domestic abuse counseling.

The Jewish Social Services Agency (JSSA)—which relies on the Federation, its largest donor, for 10 percent of its income—has had to go 30 percent over budget to assist its fast-growing list of clients, which includes senior citizens whose families can no longer afford to help support them. JSSA also reported that 150 of the 200 people on its waiting list are children and teenagers. JSSA is one of the largest providers of mental health services in Montgomery County in part because it accepts almost all insurance, is non-sectarian in providing services, and allows sliding scale payments. A Meals on Wheels program for 160 Holocaust survivors exceeded its annual budget in the first quarter of the fiscal year. JSSA's number for those seeking help is 301-816-2633.

The second half of the meeting concerned how congregations can weather the economic crisis. There was discussion of strategic plans—where each congregation saw its itself in three to five years, and what can change or be cut. Beth Chai came out looking very good since we already have potluck events as opposed to catered and because we don't have our own building or support staff. We might want to revisit the idea of fully electronic newsletters. We are also fortunate that most of our income arrived in August and September with the payments of dues, tuition, and High Holiday tickets. The downturn really hit just after that point, but if there's no turnaround by next Labor Day, we will likely be affected financially so your board will continue to be prudent in its spending and its budgeting.

I hope everyone has a Happy New Year.

—David Elfin

Beth Chai Represented at Civil Rights Ceremony, Offers Help Locating Inaugural Housing

I was in Florida last month for the annual grave-site ceremony for civil rights pioneers Harry and Harriette Moore, who were killed in a KKK bombing in 1951. Their daughter Evangeline Moore was our 2006 King Day speaker.

I put flowers at the grave, and delivered a card on behalf of Beth Chai, which was acknowledged at the ceremony. I also attended the groundbreaking for a rebuilt replica of the bombed house.

It was very moving to learn that many of the people in attendance are planning to travel here for the inauguration. These are mainly older African-Americans, of very modest means, longtime NAACP members who are still in deep

shock over Obama's election. They have been beaten down for so long that they truly never thought this day would ever come. Jan. 20 is going to be a day of deliverance, resurrection, or whatever one calls it to many people.

I offered our house for lodging, and had some grateful takers. But additional space is needed. So, if you (or someone you know) have a spare room or two to offer for Jan. 20, please contact me at khfeinstein@verizon.net.

You will be performing a true mitzvah. It is just amazing how much this inauguration means to people who have spent much of their lives as second-class citizens.

—Howie Feinstein

Adult Education for January Sessions to Explore the Future of Civil Rights, Look at Classical Religious Texts for Insight into Jews' Cultural Origins

Here's a look at Beth Chai's adult education programming for Sundays this month. All programs take place at Burning Tree Elementary School, from 10 a.m. to noon.

Jan. 11: Why Do Humanists Need to Read the Classical Religious Texts? (Part 1). Found in the Hebrew Bible are the oldest known cultural artifacts of Jewish civilization. Whether or not its stories took place just as described, they reveal much about our ancestors' daily lives. Moreover, as foundational myths of our culture, they provide a window onto our people's emotional lives, embodying their values, fears, and aspirations. Rabbi Art Blecher will guide us through an examination of how the varied and rich material of the Bible, in the absence of physical markers of our origins, serves us as an intellectual, spiritual, and historical anchor.

Jan. 18: Beth Chai's Annual King Day Program. At Beth Chai, this day not only marks Dr. King's birthday, but also honors all those who participated in the civil rights movement. For this year's event, the theme will be civil rights and the future of our multicultural society, especially in light of the election of Barack Obama, from the perspective of two generations.

Our presenters will be 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 outlets.

Please join us for this annual tribute to the progress toward equality and justice that is central to the mission of Beth Chai. There will be ample opportunity for members to participate.

Jan. 25: Why Do Humanists Need to Read the Classical Religious Texts? (Part 2). A vast rabbinic literature, compiled over a thousand-year period beginning a few centuries before the Common Era, records the daily workings of Judean society. More than that, it documents the moral, intellectual, and legal principles that determined the course of Jewish history. The pages of the voluminous Midrash and Talmud contain the central concepts that informed the decisions of Judea's leaders as they confronted conquering empires and internal factions. Led by Rabbi Art Blecher, we will explore the patterns of thinking in these works, which—though they may seem quaint to many of us today—were critical to determining the outcome of real events, including civil wars and revolutions.

Bake Sale Yields Dozens of Gifts for Toys for Tots

Beth Chai's generosity was outstanding at the bake sale my son Sasha organized last month as a benefit for Toys for Tots. We raised more than \$450 from the bake sale alone. I was impressed with the array of treats, many baked by children themselves. Thanks go to Marty Dobson, too, for assisting me during the entire sale.

Two private donations in addition to the bake sale boosted the total money raised to more than \$600, including one from a Library of Congress staff member who was impressed by Sasha's interest in the welfare of others.

Sasha went to Toys R Us with the proceeds because I had a coupon that boosted his purchasing power even more. The staff at the Rockville Toys R Us store was tremendous. They took the cash we had raised and converted it to a gift card so we didn't have to walk around with a bulging pocket full of cash. Unbeknownst to me, the manager coded the gift card tax-free, so that every penny we raised

Sasha Schneer poses with the overloaded cart of toys he purchased for Toys for Tots with the proceeds from last month's bake sale.

went toward buying toys. Sasha had fun making his selections and dreaming of the pleasure children would receive when they opened their gifts.

Thank you everyone for your generosity. You've made the holidays happier for many children—and in a delicious and enjoyable way! And thank you all for helping Sasha to absorb the lessons that are taught at Beth Chai every week!



—Sara Duke

Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sunday, Jan. 4	No Sunday School or Adult Ed (Winter Break)	
Sunday, Jan. 11, 9:30 a.m. Assembly 10 a.m.–noon Classes & Adult Ed	Sunday School; Post Mitzvah Class; Pre-School Class Adult Ed: “Why Do Humanists Need to Read the Classical Religious Texts? (Part 1)”	Burning Tree Elementary School 7900 Beech Tree Road, Bethesda
Tues., Jan. 13, 7 p.m.	Board Meeting All interested members are welcome to attend.	Home of Julie & Billy Vigdor, 5108 44th St. N.W., Washington
Sunday, Jan. 18, 9:30 a.m. Assembly 10 a.m.–noon Classes & Adult Ed	Sunday School; Pre-School Class Adult Ed: MLK Day Program	Burning Tree Elementary School
Fri., Jan. 23, 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 song leader, and discussion of “Loving One’s Neighbor as Oneself”	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUUC, Fireside Room (2nd floor), 6301 River Road, Bethesda (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sunday, Jan. 25, 9:30 a.m. Assembly 10 a.m.–noon Classes & Adult Ed	Sunday School; Pre-School Class Adult Ed: “Why Do Humanists Need to Read the Classical Religious Texts? (Part 2)”	Burning Tree Elementary School
Sunday, Jan. 25 Noon–12:30 p.m.	Jewish Summer Camp Fair	Burning Tree Elementary School
Sunday, Feb. 1 9:30 a.m. Assembly 10 a.m.–noon Classes & Adult Ed	Sunday School; Pre-School opt-in; Post-Mitzvah Adult Ed: topic to be announced	Burning Tree Elementary School



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