



# BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

## Beth Chai Observes MLK Day on Jan. 15

### January 15: Fire on the Bayou - Special Martin Luther King Day Program.

Beth Chai member Howie Feinstein will speak about his civil rights activism in the American South in the '60s, '70s, and '80s. As a federal litigator in the latter two decades, he prosecuted cases ranging in content from cross-burning and police brutality to school desegregation and housing discrimination, including some cases in which the Ku Klux Klan was implicated. Besides recounting personal experiences, Howie will discuss where the country is now in terms of civil rights and describe the self-examination he has been going through while working on a book about his career in civil rights. Among the interesting aspects of Howie's introspection are the realizations he has had regarding the role of his Jewish roots in his engagement in social action. The author of the 1999 book, *Developing Issues in the Legal Status of Women*, Howie has taught classes in civil rights, sex discrimination, and other legal topics at the University of Maryland, George Washington University, and Hood College. (For location and time of this and other adult education events at Beth Chai, turn to page 3.)



## Shabbat Service & Program: Israeli Folk Dancing! For Beginners (and Others)

**January 20:** Beth Chai member Robin Graine, in the spirit of our Mitzvah students, has undertaken to learn in order to teach. Robin, a group exercise instructor and personal trainer, has been educating herself in Israeli folk dancing so that she can pass the knowledge on to the rest of us — which she will do beginning with this Shabbat program. Adults and kids alike are invited to take a whirl... and if there are experienced folk dancers in the congregation, Robin would be delighted if they pitch in with the instruction.

Mark Your Calendars!

## Beth Chai Auction Set for March 26

by Ron Leve



Yes, I know, we just got done with the book sale, but in order to match the success of last year's auction, planning must begin now.

Right now our priority is making sure we have a group of folks to make this event succeed. We need your help in brainstorming and planning at the beginning and then your efforts at implementation to make the auction itself happen. The latter entails making follow-up calls to our letters requesting donations and help in writing the catalog. I know you might not be thinking about this now, but putting on a book sale or an auction takes many, many hours of work — so please, make yourself available.

I'd like to ask you to consider what you can donate to both the silent and live auctions. As you'll recall, last year there were weekends at the beach and in the mountains, performing arts events, a wonderful variety of services and lessons, art objects, and great baskets of wine, just to name a few categories. For new members and old ones who would like to get ideas or refresh their memories, you can view last year's catalog on the Beth Chai website at [www.bethchai.org](http://www.bethchai.org); first, go to the "events" page, and then scroll down to the auction notice to find the link to the 2005 catalog. (Continued on page 3.)



There will be the usual break after the service, but given the informal character of this month's activity, no one is likely to feel inhibited about coming and going as desired.

(For complete details about location, food options, times, and RSVP information, see the box on page 2.)



Beth Chai Directory	Position	Telephone	Email
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Deborah Signer Balaschak	Co-President		<a href="mailto:balasig@verizon.net">balasig@verizon.net</a>
Bob Rosenblatt	Vice President		<a href="mailto:boblatt@aol.com">boblatt@aol.com</a>
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Diane Sonnenberg	Secretary		<a href="mailto:dianesonnenberg@mac.com">dianesonnenberg@mac.com</a>
Dr. Arthur Blecher	Rabbi		<a href="mailto:ablecher@starpower.net">ablecher@starpower.net</a>
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Ken Jacobson	Program Chair		<a href="mailto:kenjacobson@hotmail.com">kenjacobson@hotmail.com</a>
Sheldon Hofferan	Liturgy Ctte./Past Pres.		<a href="mailto:ibkoolpaw@yahoo.com">ibkoolpaw@yahoo.com</a>
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Mary Ellen Petrisko	Past President		<a href="mailto:mpetrisko@tai.edu">mpetrisko@tai.edu</a>
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Peggy Robin	Newsletter Editor		<a href="mailto:probin@adlerrobin.com">probin@adlerrobin.com</a>
David Elfin	Publicity Committee		<a href="mailto:elfind@verizon.net">elfind@verizon.net</a>
Josh Lubell	Social Action Committee		<a href="mailto:JoshLubell@yahoo.com">JoshLubell@yahoo.com</a>
Marji Ross	Music Committee		<a href="mailto:mross@eaglepub.com">mross@eaglepub.com</a>
Beth Chai Answering Service/Email	Beth Chai Web Site		<a href="http://www.bethchai.org">www.bethchai.org</a> ; <a href="mailto:info@bethchai.org">info@bethchai.org</a>

**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.

## b Community News a



### Welcome to New Members

Welcome to Aaron Ucko and Yevgeniya Nusinovich and son Solly of Washington.

### Welcome to New Baby

Rowan and his parents, Mark Shmueli and Elizabeth Quinn, are pleased to announce the arrival of little brother Niall Argust Shmueli, at 1:40 PM on November 25. He weighed in at 8 pounds, 6 ounces.



### Congratulations on New Book

Beth Chai's webmaster, Bill Adler, has just come out with a new book titled, *How to Negotiate Like a Child: Unleash the Little Monster within to Get Everything You Want* (Amacom), which was named by the Houston Chronicle as one of the top 10 best business books of 2005.



### Corrections

In the December issue we misspelled the names of two members who received our special thanks for their help with the Book & Media Sale. Our corrected thank-yous go to Julie Vigdor and Duris Bega Toolanen.

### January 20 Shabbat Service and Program Information

#### Schedule:

**7 to 8 PM:** A buffet supper, costing \$10 per person and set out at 7 PM, 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, January 19, either by phone at 202-462-2472 or by email at [kenjacobson@hotmail.com](mailto: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 9:30-10 PM:** Kicking up of heels.

**Location of all Beth Chai Shabbats (unless otherwise indicated):**

Beth Chai Congregation at River Road U.C.  
 Fireside Room. 2nd Floor  
 6301 River Road (entrance on Whittier Blvd.)  
 Bethesda, MD

# Program Notes for Adult Education - January 2006



**January 8, 22 & 29: Jewish Life-Cycle Practices.** This series, led by Rabbi Blecher, has been met with such enthusiasm that it will be allowed to continue until either the subject or the congregation is exhausted. In January, two full Adult Ed sessions and one half-session (on January 22) are available for it; scheduled to resume on January 8 with “Divorce,” the series currently appears unlikely to make its way through the final topic, “Illness and Death,” before the end of the month. As was the case in earlier sessions, Rabbi Blecher — at times in the guise (and the yarmulke) of an orthodox rabbi, at times speaking straight from his humanist heart — will describe and explain both traditional and contemporary Jewish rituals surrounding life’s turning points. Presentations encompass the Jewish laws governing ceremonies that mark these moments, folk practices and attitudes associated with them, and modern, humanistic alternatives for honoring and understanding them. Should the life-cycle series conclude before the month’s end, we will get a head start on our planned exploration of *Pirkei Avot*, the portion of the Mishna dealing with ethics. (Please see the article below for information on how to buy copies of the text of *Pirkei Avot* and of a book to be discussed during the February 5 session of Adult Ed.)

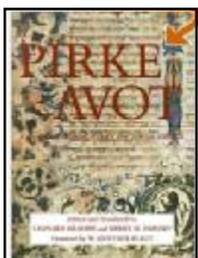
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## Ordering Instructions for Adult Education Texts

Planned for Adult Education are discussions of *Pirkei Avot*, the portion of the Mishna dealing with Jewish ethics, and *He, She and It*, a novel by the contemporary Jewish author Marge Piercy. The February 5 Adult Ed session, led by Education Director Rain Zohav, will be devoted to the Piercy work. A series on *Pirkei Avot*, which will be led by Rabbi Art Blecher, will begin in late January, if the current series on Jewish Life-Cycle Practices concludes before the end of that month; otherwise, it is likely to begin on February 12.

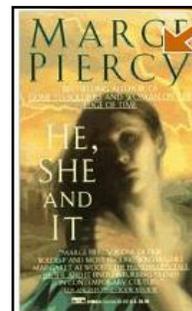
Those who ordered either or both of these books in December when the Mitzvah class was taking book orders may pick up their copies, which have now arrived, at Sunday School. Those who have not ordered them but would like to do so may get them through Amazon.com. We ask that you enter Amazon through the portal on the Beth Chai web site; get there by going to [www.bethchai.org/books.html](http://www.bethchai.org/books.html) and then clicking on the “Search New and Used Amazon.com” logo that appears on a black background (see example, at right). When you order through Amazon via Beth Chai, a portion of the proceeds benefits Beth Chai.

The bibliographical references are as follows:



*Pirkei Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics*, edited and translated by Leonard Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, ISBN 0-8074-0480-2, Amazon price \$10.17 (as of 12/11/05). There are other editions of *Pirkei Avot*, but this is the one Rabbi Blecher has recommended for our use.

*He, She and It*, by Marge Piercy, ISBN 0-449-22060-5, Amazon price \$7.50 (as of 12/11/05).




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(Auction news, continued from front page.)

Finally, we're planning an effort to boost restaurant donations similar to what was done for the performing arts last year. I know from hard experience that cold-calling restaurants successfully for a donations does not come easy. And this is where each of you enters the picture. If you approach one or two (and I wouldn't mind several) of your favorites, especially where you're known, you would have a much better chance of landing that certificate for us. You can tell them they will receive a letter from us acknowledging the donation in the amount that they state it is worth. It would also help our relations with merchants if you would notify me of the place(s) that you plan to approach, so that we don't have several people approaching the same restaurant. Of course, letting us know as soon as possible the result would be most helpful. You can contact me, Ron Leve, by phone at 202-496-9292, or by email at [TheRon@comcast.net](mailto:TheRon@comcast.net). I'm looking forward to working with all of you.

## Letter from the Education Director — January 2006

*Dear Congregants,*



We will not meet on January 1 due to our winter break. We resume on January 8 and will meet also on January 15, 22, and 29. We do not take off for the Sunday of the Martin Luther King holiday weekend because we prefer to use that day to examine the Jewish values that are so central to understanding the civil rights movement and Jewish involvement in past and current struggles for justice. Classes learn about this day in an age-appropriate manner. Often the older classes join us for adult education on that day, depending on the particular program.

This year we are very lucky to have newish Beth Chai member, Howie Feinstein, speak to us about his involvement in civil rights court cases in the south. Many of these involved prosecutions of Ku Klux Klan, and also some school desegregation cases. Howie is in the process of writing a book about these cases and his experiences. He will also address the question of where we are now in terms of civil rights and his own process of self-examination as he writes his book. One of the many interesting aspects of this introspection is the realization of the part that Howie's Jewish roots played in his involvement. The mitzvah class will be attending this session. I would appreciate hearing from parents of 5th and 6th graders about whether you would like your students to participate or feel that the subject matter might be too adult for them.

I firmly believe that it is by learning about the entire grassroots effort that was the historic civil rights movement and by doing what we can now to further equality that we best honor the memory of Martin Luther King. We cannot separate out the prophetic call for justice from our tradition and nor should we teach our children that rituals are more important than this call. This is why I feel so strongly that we must always set aside time in our adult education and in our Sunday school to learn about this history and the current work within a Jewish framework.

Please remember that in the case of inclement weather, if Montgomery County closes, we close. If Montgomery County does not close, we might still close, depending on the situation of the parking lot at Burning Tree, the condition of the streets our teachers must travel in the morning, and other factors. Room parents will either email or phone the families in their classes. Adult education participants, please check your email before heading out — that is the main way we will let you know if we cancel due to snow. Let's hope for snow on weekdays and only clear weather during the months of January and February on Sundays and Friday evenings!

B'Shalom,

*Rain Zohav*




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### Hurricane Evacuees Settle in Our Communities: An Update

by Rachel Feldman

When you read this, we will have completed our efforts to furnish homes for hurricane evacuees resettling in the DC area. Out of the 230 households set up for hurricane evacuee families coming into DC, our project substantially furnished 36 and provided donations of household accessories and furniture to 120 families. We used our donated funds to pay for storage so that not only our donations but those provided by other groups could be routed from donors to families. We also used donated funds to purchase clean new bedding, to buy basic kitchen items, tables, chairs, a bunkbed, and a variety of other items social workers asked for. Remaining funds purchased gift certificates to fill gaps in family household needs.

We held a thank-you breakfast for the 40 social workers and staff at the "Strong Families" agency in northeast DC and took goodies to the staff at the storage facility that donated part of the storage and helped the truck drivers. Despite pre-Katrina budget cuts, fewer staff and increased caseloads, these social workers worked night and day to move families out of hotels and shelters. As I write, the last families in hotels are being moved to apartments. A number of project donors also adopted at least 8 families by purchasing gifts for the children for the holidays. One long term "adoption" relationship was developed through this activity. Our relationship with "Strong Families" is well established now and can form a foundation for other social action projects for Beth Chai in the future. (Continued on next page.)

# Rabbi's Message

For American Jews, there are two New Years: Rosh Hashanah and, of course, January 1. Most rabbis sermonize about the Jewish New Year, but I think there is valuable spiritual meaning in the secular New Year.

Calendar and the marking of time have always been a major part of Jewish religious life. Historically, Judaism marks time by observing the cycles of moon and the cycles of the sun. But observing a new year on midnight of January first doesn't coordinate with either the moon or the sun. It happens in the middle of the night during the darkest period of the year (at least in our part of the globe).

The Jewish emphasis on marking time has to do with connectedness. When I use a watch, I may be timing how long something takes, but often I am coordinating what I am doing with the lives of others. Coordinating things in time is a way of being connected. If I have no connections to anyone else in the universe, maybe I don't need to know what time it is. Judaism is very aware of marking time: weeks, months, years. When we mark anniversary time — the 50th of this event, the second occurrence of that event — we are also connecting with others.

Yet we start our civil new year in just past the dark of the night and just past the dark of the year. Why not at the light of a new dawn, why not in the warmth of spring? Why not brightness instead of darkness? What kind of connection can we see in this?



Maybe it reminds us that the dark can always become the light. That dark contains the secret of the potential for growth and life. Present and future and past are one.

So we begin the year not with achievement but with promise, not with fulfillment but with potential, not with being but with becoming.

— Rabbi Arthur C. Blecher

*(Hurricane Evacuee Resettlement, continued from previous page.)*

When I say WE, I am referring to many people who have contributed to this effort. At least 25 Beth Chai families have contributed some combination of money, furniture, other household items, food, and time. Beth Chai families have involved friends, extended family, neighbors and work colleagues bringing dozens of other people into the project. Harriet Hirsch has helped coordinate all of this. Around 90 donation receipts and thank-you letters were sent out.

Harriet and I have experienced the special pleasure of getting to meet some incredible people and to see the ripples of change that flow from this type of work. I heard many remarks while schlepping boxes about the generosity of the Jewish community. We also received the thanks of many non-Jewish donors for facilitating their donation. Social service staff made presentations about their efforts using Beth Chai as an example of how faith based organizations can help them do their work. The agency director told me after our third delivery that her staff had started asking friends and relatives to donate items because of the visibility of our donations. A social worker told me she was visiting a hard-to-reach client and brought a donated TV and bed linens with her. Not only did the client welcome her and accept the donations with enthusiasm, but neighbors came out and told her they might come in for services....they didn't realize that government workers could bring them things they really needed. Going into tough neighborhoods to assist traumatized and distrustful people is easier when social workers can bring something tangible. The children of one family whose home we furnished expressed surprise to HUD staff that anyone would honor their requests for the computers, bikes, and desks needed to adapt to their new schools. One of our donor families that had been planning to move out of state immediately after Christmas decided they would rather see their furniture go to settle a traumatized family before Christmas, even though they will be in an almost empty house for the holidays. They will buy new furniture after they move.



Thanks to all concerned for the patience to put up with logistical hassles and work through bureaucratic snafus. It has been a privilege to witness the joy, enthusiasm, and generosity so many people bring to giving. Poverty, however, is bottomless, and so we will continue to look for other ways to help.

# Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sun., Jan. 8 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: Jewish Life Cycle Practices (part 5 of series), led by Rabbi Art Blecher	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun., Jan. 15 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: Civil Right veteran and Beth Chai member Howie Feinstein talks about his work as a federal civil rights litigator in the south.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Fri., Dec. 9 at 8 PM; light supper begins at 7 PM	Shabbat service & program on Israeli folk dancing, led by Robin Graine.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, Fireside Rm., 2nd fl., 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sun., Jan. 22 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: Jewish Life Cycle Practices (part 6 of series), led by Rabbi Art Blecher	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun., Jan. 22 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 <a href="mailto:juliehz@erols.com">juliehz@erols.com</a> to RSVP and get directions.
Sun., Jan. 29 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School. Adult Ed. topic: Jewish Life Cycle Practices (part 7 of series), led by Rabbi Art Blecher	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda



## Beth Chai Congregation

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**Address Correction Requested**



*Winter Reminder:  
For snow closing info see  
Rain's school letter, p. 4,  
or check [www.BethChai.org](http://www.BethChai.org)*