



# BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

## Beth Chai Auction: See You There!

The fun begins at 10 AM and goes on until noon on Sunday, 11 March, 2007 at Burning Tree Elementary School in Bethesda. There will not be a music assembly, but there will be an hour of class time for students from 10 to 11 AM. To help prepare you for the bidding, the Beth Chai Café will open with its goodies at 9:45 AM. And remember to bring your checkbooks or cash as we do not take credit cards. Don't forget your calendar so that you can check your availability for many of the events offered. You will be receiving an advance copy of the auction catalog in the mail in the week prior to the auction to help whet your appetite for the event.

Not unusual for Beth Chai, this event has more than one meaning. On the practical level, did you know that close to 15% of this year's budget was raised at the last auction? These funds enable us to provide more services to you and to minimize any change in our already low membership dues. That's why we urge you to invite family, friends, neighbors and work acquaintances to join us. It's clear that our fundraising ability is directly related to the number of people who attend.

But, on the other hand, this is more than just a fundraiser. Outside of the High Holidays, this is probably the event where the greatest numbers of Beth Chai'ers congregate during the year.

It has been scientifically determined that this community gathering has a schmooze/fun factor that reaches near-astronomical levels. What a great way to introduce folks to Beth Chai by inviting them to join us.

Though this article is being written a full month before the auction, we've already got some wonderful selections:

- ✧ Sure to be the highlight of the live auction and pictured above, this object is described by its donor as "A Judean black glazed juglet, 1<sup>st</sup> Temple Period ca 1000 - 586BC. Height: 2 ¾ inches." In case that doesn't click with you, that's back to the time of King Solomon.

*(continued on page 2)*



This antique Judean juglet dating from the First Temple period will be a featured item at our live auction!

*March Adult Ed:*

## Purim Unveiled

*Plus: More Islam & Judaism,  
Biblical Archaeology*

**March 4 (11 am – noon): Purim from a Contemporary Perspective.**

Following Beth Chai's Purim party, Rabbi Art Blecher will unveil some powerful themes lurking behind the holiday's merriment. The colorful characters in the Book of Esther, or Megillah, are players in an allegory illuminating the Diaspora Jews as a vulnerable minority; at the same time, the cartoonish reading given the Megillah at Purim is a lampoon of synagogue ritual. Rabbi Blecher will explore the holiday in the context of two of American Judaism's current debates: What line separates self-deprecating humor from the perpetuation of stereotypes? and What is the difference between criticism of Jewish community policy and anti-Semitism?

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**Note:** March 11th, the day of the auction, is also the day that Daylight Savings Time goes into effect this year. Remember to set your clocks forward so you won't be late!

## 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 Hoffermand.	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
Social Action Chair	Howie Feinstein*	301-564-9482	khfeinstein@us.net
Tot Shabbat Coordinator	Joe Gitchell	301-656-6124	kgitchel@pinneyassociates.com
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.

### A Note from the Social Action Chair

I would like to express my appreciation of the unique environment we have here at Beth Chai, created by our diverse, open-minded and thoughtful membership body. Just two examples of this are recent events at Adult Education: A joint Jewish/Moslem Perspective presentation by Rabbi Blecher and Karim Chaibi, and the MLK Day meeting with Juanita Evangeline Moore.

Art and Karim's frank exposition of not just the similarities and differences, but the strengths and weaknesses, of their respective religious texts was something that rarely takes place throughout the country. This candor is something we take for granted, as part and parcel of Beth Chai's tradition of diversity of thought, open discussion, and emphasis on egalitarian participation.

Our King Day speaker, Juanita Evangeline Moore, noted how comfortable she felt in the Beth Chai community. Ms. Moore was particularly impressed by members' questions regarding her ability to maintain her own health and dignity during her 55-year quest for justice born of unspeakable personal tragedy. Ms. Moore is a veteran of many public appearances and interviews, but she noted that it was rare and very comforting, to experience such concern for her own travails and well-being.

Beth Chai is a small congregation; we will not likely change the world. However, we can continue to promote understanding – both internally and externally -- across lines of faith, ethnicity, gender, orientation, disability, etc., and have a great time doing it.

Thank you,

*Howard Feinstein*

## Rabbi's Message



# Judaism in America Today — Part II

While it is not true that American Jews are vanishing, it is true that they are keenly dedicated to the survival of Jewish identity. It is precisely this fervor which makes Jews so vulnerable to alarmist theories about disappearance. Their passion for survival is fueled by their desire to preserve the memory of generations that have passed.

There is another reason that Jews in America are so vigilant about their fate and so ready to accept the myth of disappearance: American Judaism has no definitive concept of individual life after death. Some Jews may believe that the soul somehow survives the death of the body, but many Jews believe the opposite: that every person's individual consciousness ends when they die; that their awareness of themselves, their personality, their ability to act in the world, their communication with living beings – everything that constitutes daily existence -- ceases. Even according to the traditional Jewish belief in *michayei hameitim* (revival of the dead), a person does not immediately go to another world after leaving this one. During the future messianic age, when the world will be made perfect, the dead will come back to life; but until that time, they do not participate in the workings of the universe.

As individuals, modern Jews may entertain different notions about life-after-death, but as a group Jews generally have not been taught to expect that upon death some part of their beings will continue to exist. Whatever their individual beliefs about life-after-death, however, the fact is that modern American Jews do not conduct themselves as if this life were merely the preparation for next. In the realm of behavior and morality, American Judaism places its emphasis firmly in this life in this world. All human actions must be directed toward the perfection of human society and collective life on earth.

Modern Jews are free to speculate about the nature of existence, but modern American Judaism in effect accepts the finality of death. The inevitability of death is a sobering – and potentially immobilizing – thought. Judaism responds to the existential angst by shifting the emphasis from the mortality of the individual to the collective immortality of the Jewish people. What it does offer is the idea that Judaism has existed since the beginning of human civilization and will endure as long as people live on earth. The antiquity of Judaism implies its eternity as well. By being part of the Jewish people, individual Jews participate in the timelessness of Jewish civilization. Everlasting Jewish identity is the life-after-death that Judaism provides. The perpetuation of Judaism promises that the memory of every Jew will be revered among the ancestors.

**RABBI ARTHUR BLECHER**

### See You at the Beth Chai Auction!

*(Continued from front page)*

- ✧ A gourmet dinner by none other than Art Blecher and Jim Clay
- ✧ An idyllic week on an island in Lake Champlain in Vermont
- ✧ Brunch for four at Dupont Circle's funky Tabard Inn
- ✧ An Afghan of your design by Julie Vigdor
- ✧ Beth Chai gatherings ranging from a swim party to several types of game nights to the sleeper event of last year, a Sing Along and Lunch with our own old "folkie", Reed Dewey and finally, our connoisseur's event, a Scottish Whisky tasting.
- ✧ Our usual extremely wide variety of performing arts tickets with ballet added this year.
- ✧ To celebrate that special event, a pair of Waterford crystal toasting goblets.

And, yes, our bashful rabbi, Art Blecher, will be the auctioneer for the live auction this year. Formerly known as the "man of many hats", he promises a new *shtick* this year.

**Donors, please note:** If you have not made your donation yet, it is not too late. So, contact Ron Leve (202-496-9292, [TheRon@comcast.net](mailto:TheRon@comcast.net)) or Julie Zalkind (703-522-1023, [juliehz@comcast.net](mailto:juliehz@comcast.net)) with your donation or if you have any questions. For food donations for the Café, contact Miriam Meyer (703-978-6638, [miriammeyer@verizon.net](mailto:miriammeyer@verizon.net))

<span style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">Community News</span>
<p style="font-size: 1.1em; font-weight: bold;">Condolences</p> <p>- To David Kahrnoff on the loss of his mother.</p>

## Letter from the Education Director - March 2007



*Dear Congregants,*

The year was 1970. The place was Kibbutz Shomrat. The month was Adar. The holiday – Purim. Suddenly, lots of the founding members of the kibbutz, now in their 40's (we called them the old folks) were coming to the group of Americans who were staying for the year, asking to borrow our clothes. Why? It turned out that the theme of that year's Purim party was "Hippies" and we had all the right clothes – torn jeans, dashikis, cow bells, beads, peace signs, etc.

Well, it's been many years since then and it seems the right time to again have a related theme "Hippies in Shushan" this year for our Beth Chai Purim Party which will be held on March 4. For those of you new to the congregation, our Purim party is a wonderful occasion for all (including adults) to indulge their inner child, or alter egos in costume, fun, laughter, good food, etc. Everyone who comes in costume will receive a prize. We will read from the Megillat Esther (Scroll of Esther) in English, while drowning out the name of Haman with noise makers. After the Megillah reading (will Megillah Gorilla again participate?), there will be an adult ed. session for adults in the media center and many games and activities for the students to enjoy. I would hazard a guess that face painting, drumming, bead work, maybe tie-dye, puppetry, Nakshehood, To the Castle and other favorites old and new will be available.

On March 11, School will meet from 10:00 – 11:00. The students will go directly to their classrooms, while their parents can participate in the Silent Auction. At 11:00, the students will join their parents to enjoy the Beth Chai café and the rest of the auction. Thank you to all the room parents who are so busy organizing class baskets for the auction and to all the parents for your donations. This is a huge event for our congregation, both in terms of fundraising and community building. It is a great event to invite grandparents to. Don't miss out on the wonderful opportunities and fun!

On March 18, all students will have a first ever chance to make something they can actually use in their homes for a Jewish holiday. Thanks again to the generous grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, Color Me Mine will be providing the materials to make either ceramic seder plates, Kiddush cups, or Miriam's cups. Each family should decide ahead of time which objects each child will make. The ceramics will be taken back to the Color Me Mine Studio, fired and returned on March 25, right in time for Passover.



**Beth Chai Retreat:** March 30 is the absolute deadline for turning in registration forms for our upcoming, also first ever Beth Chai retreat, which will be on Saturday, April 28, Sunday, April 29. This is a chance to get to know each other in an informal setting. For anyone who likes a camp-like atmosphere, with indoor plumbing, no tents and great company – this is the experience for you. Dinner Saturday night is potluck, a simple breakfast and lunch will be provided by Beth Chai. We will all pitch in with set-up and clean up of the meals.

We will have activities for all ages, including a Humanist Havdalah, a sing along, with guest artist Lisa Baydush, games, crafts, and adult ed.: Israel through the Window of Literature. There is the option of coming up only on Sunday for those of you who do not have fond memories of camp. See the registration form attached to this newsletter and posted on our website and in your email events lists for a complete schedule of the day. This program is also supported by our I.C. E. grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington.



*B'Shalom,  
Rain Zohav*



The Beth Chai retreat will be held at Shepherd's Spring, a 220 acre retreat center adjoining the C&O canal in Maryland.

## March 2007 Shabbat Service and Program

# A Bagel Tasting: Which is the “Real Mechaiah”?

**Friday, March 23.** “Where do bagels come from?” If your child has asked you, and you’ve found yourself at a loss for words, attending Beth Chai March Shabbat program will improve your response to this delicate yet inevitable question. Most of us know what bagels aren’t – those hockey pucks in the supermarket’s freezer case, for one – but where do you find the archetype? Is there a source in the DC area? Does New York’s vaunted H&H set the standard? How about bagels made in the Vermont woods by a Montreal refugee? (We kid you not!)? Come, taste, learn... and enjoy.

The service preceding this program will be enlivened by the presence of song leader Andrea Foster, a trained cantor active in Jewish education in the Washington area, who will guide our, at times, tonally challenged assembly through the musical parts of the liturgy.

### Schedule:

**6:30-7pm:** Tot Shabbat

**7-8 pm:** A light supper consisting 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, March 22, either by email at [TheRon@comcast.net](mailto: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:** No gluten-free areas here.

### Sunday Morning Announcements: A New Procedure

From now on, all Sunday morning announcements will be made shortly before the end of the 9:30-10:00 assembly period. Those wishing to keep up on the latest congregational news are asked to be at Burning Tree and seated in the all-purpose room (or “auditorium,” depending on their generation) by 9:50 a.m., since announcements will generally start between 9:50 and 9:55.

Those wishing to make announcements at the assembly are asked to email either or both of the Program Co-chairs – Ken Jacobson ([kenjacobson@hotmail.com](mailto:kenjacobson@hotmail.com)), Andrew Strongin ([astrongin@adrmil.com](mailto:astrongin@adrmil.com)) – by the preceding Friday evening. In addition, they are asked to keep their announcements as brief as possible and to use leaflets, postings, and similar methods for conveying detailed information.

All those with questions are invited to contact Ken or Andrew. Many thanks.

### 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

### March Adult Ed:

## Jewish and Muslim Identity; Archeology and Politics

(continued from front page)

### March 18: Judaism Meets Islam, Part III – The Construction of Identity.

In the third of a multi-part exploration of the two traditions that began last month, Rabbi Art Blecher and Beth Chai member Karim Chaibi will talk about some of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices that help make Jews and Muslims who they are.

Among the subjects considered will be: the religious and practical rights and duties of men and women; the connection between sexuality, in its various forms, and sin; concepts of faith and apostasy, including the limits and consequences of irreverence; and the organization and power of religious authority. As with past sessions, each speaker will make a separate presentation on his own tradition, with general discussion to follow.

### March 25: Archaeology and Politics in Israel and Palestine.

Archaeology in the Holy Land began as a political venture and continues to have political overtones and implications to this very day, Jerusalem-based archaeologist David Ilan will argue in a follow-up to his enthusiastically received January talk on Archaeology and the Bible. He will relate how archaeology in the region began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a political agenda, how Zionism and then Palestinian nationalism have used archaeology to further their agendas, and how archaeology is embroiled in the modern conflict – as illustrated by recent headlines devoted to the Temple Mount, or Haram es Sharif. He will also discuss how archaeology can do its own small part in healing the social and psychological wounds of conflict in the Middle East.

Dr. Ilan directs the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at Jerusalem’s Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

# Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sun. March 4 at 10AM Congregational Purim Celebration. 11AM for Adult Ed.	Megillah reading and Purim Party. Pre-K welcome to Purim celebration. Adult Ed topic: Purim from a Contemporary Perspective, with Rabbi Blecher. See front page article.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. Mar. 11 at 10 AM for students; Auction 10-12	Annual Beth Chai auction. See front page article. Sunday School and Pre-K from 10-11. No Adult Education.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. March 18 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School. Pre-K. Post-Mitzvah Class. Adult Ed topic: "Judaism Meets Islam, Part III" – Rabbi Art Blecher and Beth Chai member Karim Chaibi. See article on page 5.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Fri., March 23-- Tot Shabbat 6:30 PM. Light supper at 7 PM. Shabbat Service at 8 PM.	Tot Shabbat. Shabbat Service with guest singer Andrea Foster leading Shabbat singing & Program: "A Bagel Tasting: Which Is the "Real Mechaiah"? See article on page 5.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, Fireside Room on second floor. 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sat. March 24 at 10AM	Tot Shabbat – Shannon Rudisell and Mark Schmueli leading.	Home of Shannon Rudisell and Jeffrey Gerber. Please RSVP to (703) 752-5809 or email <a href="mailto:JMG_SLR@hotmail.com">JMG_SLR@hotmail.com</a>
Sun. March 25 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Adult Ed.	Sunday School. Rising Mitzvah Class Parent Meeting. Adult Ed topic: "Archaeology and Politics in Israel and Palestine," with archaeologist David Ilan. See article on page 5.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. March 25 from 7-9 pm	Beth Chai board meeting. All interested members are welcome to attend.	Home of Rabbi Art Blecher and James Clay in Washington, D.C. To RSVP and get directions, email <a href="mailto:ABlecher@starpower.net">ABlecher@starpower.net</a> or call (202) 462-5448.



## Beth Chai Congregation

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

Answering service: 301-229-7400

Email: [info@bethchai.org](mailto:info@bethchai.org)

Website: [www.bethchai.org](http://www.bethchai.org)

Address Correction Requested

