



# BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

*Adult Education for May:*

## The Face of Jewish DC and The Other Sons

**May 6: The Other Sons – Rejection, Disinheritance, and Chosenness in Jewish Tradition.**

In the first two generations descended from Abraham, it was the second son rather than the first-born son who became the heritor of the Covenant. Rabbi Art Blecher will discuss what Genesis says about two pairs of brothers – Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob – with a focus on the stories’ implications for Jewish identity and for Jewish-Gentile relations today.

In conjunction with our annual School Open House, this session will run from 11:15-noon only; Adult Ed regulars are, however, encouraged come at 10 a.m. as usual and to take part in a get-acquainted session with prospective new members.

**May 20: Jewish Demographics in the DC area (tentative).**

How has the Jewish population of our area evolved in recent times, and what is its composition now? A representative of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington who has been heavily involved in the most recent local demographic study will talk about such attributes of area Jews as origin, age, education, and wealth, as well as discussing their implications for the types of services local Jewish institutions offer.

As end-of-year class presentations are scheduled for 11:15-noon, this session will take place from 10-11 a.m. only. (Please check the weekly email for final details of this program.)



Rabbi Art Blecher reads at the Beth Chai Community Seder, which was held on April 7th. Photo by Alan Kotok.



Young Beth Chai member Solly Ucko studies some alternate readings at our annual Community Seder. Photo by Alan Kotok.

## *Beth Chai’s Annual Meeting & Potluck*

**Sunday, May 20 at 6 PM**

All members of Beth Chai are invited to the annual membership meeting. It will be a pot luck dinner at a location to be determined. Although this is mostly a social event, and very kid-friendly, we have some serious business to attend to. On this night, we will elect and welcome the new board members (see page 5 for the list of candidates) and also hear about the preliminary budget for next year.

Please RSVP to Mike Wexler at [ela.mike@verizon.net](mailto:ela.mike@verizon.net) to let him know what you will be bringing to the potluck. Look for the location in an upcoming weekly email. Thanks — and hope to see you there!

## 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	juliehzh@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.



## Community News



### Announcements

- ✧ Wendy and Dusty Baber announce the arrival of a daughter, Sonja Elise born April 7<sup>th</sup> weighing 6 lbs, 8 oz. Congratulations Wendy, Dusty and Zoe.
- ✧ Congratulations to Bob Rosenblatt on the birth of his granddaughter, Zoe.
- ✧ Congratulations to Theresa Mittelman on her upcoming bat mitzvah on May 19 at RRUC at 10 AM. Beth Chai members are invited to attend the service and join the family for the Kiddush.
- ✧ Gayle Friedman had a pair of her earrings, featured in a newly published book on jewelry called "500 Earrings."

### Going Away Party

The Feinsteins invite Beth Chai members to a going away party for Karim Chaibi and Lora Berg, at their home, 6009 Conway Rd., Bethesda, on Sat., May 12, 2:00 – 5:00 pm.

This will be a highly informal event, children welcome. Potential exists for live music, poetry/prose readings, fiery revolutionary diatribes, etc.

Please join us in bidding adieu to Karim and Lora, who are off to a State Department-designated "Severe Hardship" posting in Paris.

— the Feinsteins



## Rabbi's Message



# Judaism in America Today — Part IV

It is no surprise that the myth of the *shtetl* is also part of American Judaism's veneration for its forbears. While only a relatively small percentage of the millions of eastern European Jews actually lived in little Jewish towns, the bearded fathers and kerchiefed mothers that populate *shtetl* literature are icons for the entire immigrant generation. The *shtetl* is the psychological process by which American Jewry's real grandparents and great-grandparents are transported back to the venerated Old World and the imagined realm of unadulterated Jewish life. The *shtetl* is as much a literary genre as a fact. Even so it has the power to bestow sanctity upon the memory of millions of Jews who came to America at the beginning of the twentieth century, along with the memory of the millions who died in the Holocaust.

The *shtetl* may be a twentieth century creation, but it also reveals the modern Jew's conception of what an ideal world would be like. When Jews imagine utopia, they think of an earthly society where ordinary people treat each other with love and respect as they go about their daily lives. The *shtetl* is a projection of important Jewish social values, and fictional or not, the ideals it represents are a very real part of Judaism's outlook on life today.

Modern American Judaism is utopian in a particular way. Jews believe that by cooperating, human beings can use the means already at their disposal to transform this world into a utopia – the Hebrew term is *tikkun olam*, perfecting the world. According to this concept, utopia is earthly; its scale is human. It consists of people living together as a just society in harmony with the natural universe. This utopia is not impossible for the ordinary person to imagine. In fact, the *shtetl* is one way of imagining it.

Because the fictionalized *shtetl* serves as a concrete model of a just and caring society, it is inspiring to Jews. Because it offers a microcosm of the Jews as a nation, it is also didactic. The *shtetl* is a prescription for a world where religious beliefs and practices, universal social ideals and cultural details of ethnicity all harmonize. Deeply-held Jewish values – venerating the ancestors, transmitting ethnic identity from generation to generation, human reason, social justice, and knowledge – these ideals populate the stage of the *shtetl* along with the stereotypical scenes and stock characters. In the stories that are reenacted there day after day, all the pieces of Judaism as civilization fit together.



'May today be the first in a lifetime of celebrations' - painting by Ibby Kleiner. An example of modern, idealized images of † European *shtetl* life.

For this reason alone, the myth of the *shtetl* is especially appealing to Jewish educators who want to encourage their students to lead totally-Jewish lives as they go about their daily business in America today. Because of its cultural familiarity and its manageable scale, the sentimentalized world of the *shtetl* provides an effective classroom model of the ideal Jewish community. The myth of *shtetl* appeals to educators not only because it is diorama of a familiar culture frozen in time, but also because it is miniature that can be taken in by a sweep of the eyes. This may explain the tendency in *shtetl* literature to portray the Jewish towns as much smaller than they actually were.

The romanticized image of *shtetl* life may be a fiction, but the Jewish dream of a harmonious society is very real.

**RABBI ARTHUR BLECHER**

## Letter from the Education Director - May 2007



*Dear Congregants,*

Can you believe that this is our last month of Sunday School? Due to college schedules we will not be meeting in June this year. We meet on May 6, which is also our **Open House**. This is a great time to invite friends who might be interested in joining to observe classrooms, participate in adult ed. and meet members. We will begin the day with our music assembly at 9:30. From 10:00 – 10:30 visitors will have an opportunity to meet with me, hear a little about the school and meet members. Visiting children can visit classes. Adult Ed. will begin at 11:15. We will have snacks all together at 11:00 and classes will resume at 11:20 – 12:00. From 12:00 – 1:00 we will have a potluck picnic for all. It happens to be Lag B'Omer, a very minor holiday that celebrates the end of a plague of Rabbi Akiba's students. Since Rabbi Akiba taught his students outdoors, in caves, in defiance of the Roman prohibition against teaching Torah, it is traditional to celebrate this by picnics and being outdoors. Of course the fact that by May we really should have good weather is a plus. But in case it rains, we will picnic indoors in the all-purpose room.

We take off for Mother's Day and then meet for our last day on May 20. We will have our end of the year performances and perhaps a pizza party to end the year with a bang. I hope that all the adults who have been attending adult ed. so enthusiastically all year will join us to see what the students have been learning. This is part of what makes us truly a Family School.

Since some of our teachers will already be back home by June, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our magnificent staff. I was in every classroom almost every week this year and found the students engaged in relevant, meaningful and fun activities at every point. I never found a situation of a teacher dully lecturing to a bored group of kids. The kind of hands-on, challenging learning that was taking place is dependent on good teachers. I hope many of our teachers will be returning. I should know much more by June. There will be a few openings also, so if you would be interested in teaching and contributing in this way, or know someone who might be interested, please let me know. Some our best teachers have come exactly from appeals like this.

Two of our long term teachers, Susan Stewart, who has taught our pre-school, and Michele Sturm, who has taught K/1, are retiring from teaching, but not from involvement with the school. Both have agreed to serve on our Parent's Council and Susan Stewart has agreed to fill the school liaison position on the board. Their warmth and creativity will be sorely missed in the classroom. However, their experience will continue to be available to whoever comes to teach those classes.

Katie Beran, who team taught 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade and Matt Kornberg – Porter will be spending next year in Denmark, as part of a junior year abroad program. We wish them well and hope they come back and teach again in their senior year.

I will save the rest of the long end of the year list of thank-you's till June.

Please help in the summer planning by registering in May at school or on line. New registration materials should be available by May 6.

*B'Shalom,  
Rain Zohav*



Julie Elfin (holding microphone) and other young Beth Chai members chant the traditional Four Questions at our annual joint Seder with RRUC. Photo by Alan Kotok.

## May 2007 Shabbat Service and Program

# Churchill: The Zionist Who Set Iraq's Borders

**Friday, May 18.** As Britain's Foreign Secretary, Winston Churchill sat down at a conference table and drew the map of modern Iraq, aiming to create an easy-to-administer property for the British Empire. But this was hardly the end of the mutual influences of Churchill and Middle East. The great statesman's strong support for a Jewish homeland – "I am, of course, a Zionist," he once proclaimed – helped shape his views on confronting the Nazi menace in Europe as well as on Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Guiding us through this aspect of Churchill's unparalleled career will be Beth Chai member Bob Rosenblatt, who is a member of the executive board of the Washington Society for Churchill and has taught courses on Churchill's life for the Learning in Retirement Institute at George Mason University.

## Schedule

**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, May 17, 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:** Buoyancy and hope...brandy and cigars.

### **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

## Candidates for Election to Beth Chai Board 2007-08

It is with great pleasure that we present the following new candidates for the Board:

President:	Andrew Strongin
Vice President:	David Elfin
Treasurer:	Pat Lovenhart
Communications Chair:	Julie Vigdor
Community Building Chair:	Shannon Rudisill
Family School Chair:	Susan Stewart
Membership Chair:	Reed Dewey
Music Chair:	Marji Ross

Continuing Board members:

Deborah Balaschak – Secretary/Past President  
Howie Feinstein – Social Action Chair  
Ron Leve – Fundraising Chair  
Rob Weinstein – Liturgy Chair  
Mike Wexler - Program Co-Chair

Suzanne Greenfield, Secretary/Past President, and Ilene Sokolsky, Treasurer, are completing their terms and will be stepping down from the board. We would like to thank them for all their hard work, commitment, and service on behalf of Beth Chai.

— *Deborah Signer Balashchak, President*

# Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sun. May 6 at 9:30 AM for students, 10 AM for Open House Sunday school; 11:15 AM for Adult Ed.	<b>Annual Sunday School Open House.</b> Adult Ed. Topic -- "The Other Sons – Rejection, Disinheritance, and Chosenness in Jewish Tradition" with Rabbi Blecher. See article on front page.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. May 14 – Mother's Day	No Sunday School. No adult Ed	--
Fri., May 18, Tot Shabbat at 6:30, Light supper at 7 PM. Shabbat Service at 8 PM.	Tot Shabbat Service. Shabbat service. "Churchill: The Zionist Who Set Iraq's Borders" With Beth Chai member Bob Rosenblatt, who is a member of the executive board of the Washington Society for Churchill. 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. May 19 at 10 AM	Bat Mitzvah of Theresa Mittelman, daughter of Diane Page and Fred Mittelman.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sun. May 20 at 9:30 AM for students, 10-11 AM for Adult Ed., 11:15-noon for end of year class presentations	Last day of Sunday School and end-of-year class presentations. Adult Ed. Topic -- "Jewish Demographics in the DC area" (tentative). Guest speaker from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. See article on front page.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda
Sun. May 20 from 6-8:30 pm	Annual Beth Chai Membership Meeting & Potluck Dinner. Voting for 2007-08 board. All members and families welcome. See article on front page.	To be determined.



## 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

*Inside this issue:*

Shabbat Program, May 18th:  
Churchill, Iraq and Zionism  
(page 5)