



# קירוב

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## The Bulletin of Congregation B'nai Israel

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Shevat 5769

February 2009

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*Judaism for Today  
In a Warm and Caring  
Environment*

### FROM THE RABBI

Dear Friends,

How green is your Torah?

*Tu B'Shevat*, the beginning of the year counted for the trees, is around the corner. The beginning of *Tu B'Shevat* is very humble: it is only a cut-off date in the calendar to mark when the agricultural cycle begins or ends for the purpose of tithes involving trees and fruit. Even its name bears its utilitarian beginning: *Tu B'Shevat* merely means the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Shevat. Yet, as a late bloomer, *Tu B'Shevat* has grown into a celebration that has not only many meanings, but many ways of celebrating.

In Israel, the flowering of the almond tree, which grows wild around the country, coincides with *Tu B'Shevat*. When one walks and sees the almond tree flowering, one senses that the winter is about to end. The almond tree, called in Hebrew *shaked*, appears in the Torah in a story fraught with tension and discord – when Korach decides to dispute the right of Aharon and his descendants of being the *cohanim*, the group that serves at the Temple. You probably remember that Aharon and every other leader of the tribes are commanded to put their staffs in the Temple, and in the morning, his staff sprouts not only almond flowers, but almonds as well<sup>1</sup>. The almond tree becomes, then, a symbol for stopping and taking account – and a symbol of hope: the winter is over, and we'll spring into action!

This date has been transformed, in recent years, into a celebration of ecological awareness, and many are

the Jewish texts that deal with the importance of trees and of having awareness of our own impact in the world. Surprisingly or not, none of those texts were written after the 8<sup>th</sup> century. One example is

When God created the first human, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, "See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy My world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you."<sup>2</sup>

This *midrash*, written around year 400, is already sensitive to the impact of human existence in the world, and points out that the partnership between God and us is actualized in how well we keep God's creation. Or, in a more contemporary way – how aware we are of the impact of human existence on the ecosystems, and how much we are working to diminish our impact. Awareness and action – the two sides of *Tu B'Shevat*.

But *Tu B'Shevat* is not just a time to think about what needs to be done. It is a time of doing and celebrating. So turn to our Mitzvah of the Month section and adopt one of the many ways of celebrating *Tu B'Shevat* in your home this year.

May we grow in awareness and action,  
Rabbi Nelly Altenburger

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot/Numbers 16:1–18:32 gives you the full story.

<sup>2</sup> Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

As I write this, on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, less than 24 hours before Barack Obama is sworn in as president, I have read and listened to much print and broadcast commentary on not only the “Extraordinariness” of these men, but the “Extraordinariness” of this significant and historic event. Today, however, and with no disrespect to either the men or the occasion, I want to write about “Ordinariness,” a subject I personally know a lot about.

Great challenges require great leaders, as certainly evidenced by the lives and careers of Rev. King and President Obama, but today I’d like to celebrate the “Ordinary,” rather than the “Extraordinary.” And as usual, I’d like to draw a parallel to synagogue life.

Congregation B’nai Israel is experiencing the same anxieties as most synagogues; tough economic times, loss of income from investments (in our case about 25%, less than most thanks to Endowments Chair Doug Wise, whose diversified portfolio strategy befits his name), reduced member donations (in part from reduced portfolios of their own), increased needs of members affected by the recession, not enough volunteers, aging buildings (buttressed by Shalom Lampell, Sol Berman and Chris Kimball’s efforts), the general decline across the nation in synagogue membership, particularly within the Conservative movement (give Barbara Levitt credit. Our numbers have gone up), etc.

Okay, and now for the good news!

All of those problems can be resolved through ordinariness, guaranteed.

Ordinary, simple, basic, unexceptional, modest efforts are all it takes to keep the ship of shuls afloat. Let President Obama worry about an economy described as “A Perfect Storm,” synagogues can navigate these dark waters not through extraordinary piloting, but with all hands

on decks, helping, creating and donating to the best of their abilities.

We just experienced that in the several months that Rabbi Nelly has been on maternity leave. Thanks to the able efforts of Ritual Chair Dr. Charles Cahn and Gabbai Henry Tritter’s deft stewardship, members have stepped in to lead services, give *D’var Torahs*, even to provide evening services at home during the Shiva period of one of our members. Not everyone can do that (lacking significant Hebrew skills, I cannot lead services, but I could give a *D’var Torah*, while some folks are much more comfortable doing the former, than the latter). That not only saved us the cost of hiring an interim rabbi (although we enjoyed having cantorial student Sharon Citrin fill in once a month), but enabled the congregation to hear the benefits of different voices, whether sung, chanted or spoken. In essence, the experience empowered the congregation as a whole, as well as the congregants who participated.

This synagogue has done well and will continue to do well, not through the extraordinary, but through the ordinary. The folks who pay their dues, who make the very best *Kol Nidre* pledge they can, who fix stuff that would otherwise cost us money to repair, who volunteer to serve on the board, fill officer positions, lead or serve on committees, shlep the chairs and put up the tables, clean up after the kiddush; the people who make the calls, write the checks, attend the services, in short the people who have a relationship with B’nai Israel.

This synagogue has done well and will continue to do well only as long as there are people willing to do those ordinary things.

Extraordinary? No, ordinary.

Oh, and from one rather ordinary president to one who will hopefully (for all our sakes) prove extraordinary, “*Mazel tov*,” President Obama.

*Shalom,*  
Joel

## MITZVAH OF THE MONTH

### Celebrate and observe *Tu B'Shevat*

#### *Observe*

Decide on one thing you and your family will do to help the environment. Here are some suggestions brought to you by the JNF (Jewish National Fund):

**Plant a tree in Israel (and in Danbury)** - On *Tu B'Shevat* in 1890, Rabbi Zeev Yavetz took his students to plant trees in the agricultural colony of Zichron Yaakov, in Israel. This custom was adopted in 1908 by the Jewish Teachers Union and later by the Jewish National Fund (Keren Hakayemet L'Israel), established in 1901 to oversee land reclamation and afforestation of the Land of Israel. Over a million Israelis now take part in the Jewish National Fund's tree-planting activities organized every year on *Tu B'Shevat*. You can do it here in your own backyard!

**In your car - *Don't idle*.** Idling wastes money and gas and creates pollution. Unless in traffic, turn off your engine if you are waiting more than one minute. *Inflate your car tires to the proper pressure.* Check your car manual for exact details. This can improve your gas mileage and save you seven cents a gallon.

**Buy locally grown produce.** The average American meal travels 1,500 miles before reaching your plate. Supporting local farmers cuts back on use of fossil fuels and air pollutants while helping your community.

**Out of your car** - Carpool or use public transportation. Carpooling can save 790 lbs. of carbon dioxide and hundreds of dollar per year. Public transportation not only reduces your emissions but helps support the area you live in.

#### *Celebrate*

**Have a fruit fest** – *Tu B'Shevat* means “the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month of *Shevat*.” In the Middle Ages, *Tu B'Shevat* was celebrated with a feast of 15 fruits, paralleling it to Rosh Hashanah, when some still have a ritual meal that has several specific foods. The reason for the parallel is because the Mishna

calls *Tu B'Shevat* a "New Year for Trees". **You can choose which 15 different fruits to serve**, and if you are creative, make puns around their names. One example is avocado - advocate. This is a great moment to expose yourself and your friends or children to tasteful adventures!

**Have a *Tu B'Shevat seder*** - In the 1600s, the kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Luria of Safed and his disciples instituted a *Tu B'Shevat seder* in which the fruits and trees of the Land of Israel were given symbolic meaning. The main idea was that eating ten specific fruits and drinking four cups of wine in a specific order while reciting the appropriate blessings would bring human beings, and the world, closer to spiritual perfection. You can find three different hagadot for your seder at [www.jnf.org/treesource](http://www.jnf.org/treesource) and also at <http://www.shalomctr.org/node/378> and in many other places in the internet. You can also decide to come for the Hebrew School *Tu B'Shevat Seder*, which will happen on Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup>, at 11:45 A.M.

Editor's Note: If you would like to honor *Tu B'Shevat*, you can celebrate your commitment to the environment and to the Land of Israel by making a donation to plant a tree in Israel.



**TREES FOR ISRAEL**

**\$18.00 PER TREE**

**TO BENEFIT  
THE JEWISH NATIONAL FUND**

**DONATIONS ENVELOPES ARE  
AVAILABLE FROM THE  
SYNAGOGUE OFFICE**

## FEBRUARY EVENTS

### **Sunday, February 8<sup>th</sup> at 11:45 A.M. Celebrate Tu B'Shevat with Religious School**

We will follow a very short *Tu B'Shevat haggadah* and then we will eat several different types of fruit as the kabbalistic rabbis did in the olden days.

Everyone is welcome

### **Wednesday, February 11<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 A.M. Mazel Tots First Meeting!**

Parents and their babies are invited to attend the introductory session of a new B'nai Israel program---Mazel Tots! at the *shul*. Please call Barbara Levitt Home: 792-2259 or cell 947-9043 for details.

### **Friday, February 20<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 P.M. Foods by Dudes**

Join us for a Kabbalat Shabbat featuring "Foods by Dudes," a service followed by a meal prepared by some of the congregation's best guy chefs. See upcoming email for details.

### **Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> at 8:30 A.M. Outreach Committee Meeting**

Join us in planning our second annual "Passover in the Aisle" at local supermarkets. All are welcome.

### **Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> from 10:00 A.M. - 11:30 A.M. Women's Group Discussion and Brunch**

At our next meeting we will be discussing coping skills for handling stressful events. Please join us.

### **Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9:30 A.M. Media/Tech Group Meeting**

The Media/Tech Group will be having its first meeting. Join with media/tech savvy people to update our website and utilize new technology and print media. E-mail Joel Levitt at [levitj@danbury.k12.ct.us](mailto:levitj@danbury.k12.ct.us) for details.

## LOOKING AHEAD

### **FRIDAY, MARCH 20<sup>TH</sup> SHABBAT ACROSS AMERICA/CANADA**

It's time once again for the event we all look forward to: **SHABBAT ACROSS AMERICA**, where synagogues throughout the country and Canada observe with one another the joys of a traditional Friday night Sabbath dinner.

The evening starts with Rabbi Nelly's beautiful *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Welcome the Sabbath) service and then we move on to a full course traditional Friday night dinner.

Reservations are a must so the evening's meal can be planned. Please call/email Cheryl in the office (203-792-6161, [cbi193clap@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cbi193clap@sbcglobal.net)) with your reservation by March 13<sup>th</sup>.

## A NOTE OF THANKS

I wanted to thank all my B'nai Israel friends for the help and kindness that was given me during my difficult time. I appreciate your support and friendship.

Julie Leventon



# Shabbat Dinner @B'nai Israel



**Date: Friday, Feb 20, 2009**

**Time: 6:30-8:30**

**All Ages Welcome!**

Join us for a Shabbat Service and the third annual Foods by Dudes community Shabbat Dinner

Cost: \$9 for adults; \$18 for families. Reservations and pre-payment required by Thursday, Feb 19.

6:30 - 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat Service

7:30 - 9:00 Shabbat Dinner

**Congregation B'nai Israel, 193 Clapboard Ridge Road, Danbury, CT, 203-792-6161**







# PURIM EXTRAVAGANZA

MONDAY, 7 P.M.  
MARCH 9TH, AT  
CONGREGATION  
B'NAI ISRAEL IN  
DANBURY, CT

 **MEGILAH READING**

-  **MASQUERADE**
-  **HAMANTASCHEN & GROGGERS**

 **WINE TASTING**

-  **SELECT KOSHER FOR PASSOVER  
RED AND WHITE WINES**
-  **LIVE KLEZMER MUSIC**
-  **CHEESE AND CRACKERS**
-  **SUGGESTED DONATION: \$ 8**



For more info call 203-792-6161



Barbara Levitt and friends at the mall for the Obama inauguration

### Hebrew School *Hanukkah* Presentation



## CBI FAMILY NEWS



Myril Bennett, with her daughter Joan Lehigh, and son David Axelrod ... and, oh yeah ... President Barack Obama

Myril Bennett was a longtime member of CBI and an inspired editor of the *Kayruv* before moving back to Manhattan and subsequently to Lasell Village in Newton, MA. Myril, a former vice president of Young and Rubicam, a Manhattan based advertising firm, used her formidable creative talents to help distill and promote the mission of our synagogue. The proud mother of Chief Presidential Strategist, David Axelrod, Myril literally had a front row seat at the January inauguration ceremony.

The following includes excerpts from articles about Myril's anticipation of the inauguration from the Boston Herald and the Lasell Village Bulletin.

It's a memorable moment to attend a Presidential inauguration and Myril Bennett has had a few of them. Bennett, a lifelong liberal recalled attending Lyndon Johnson's inauguration in 1965. David, then 9, watched as well from the cherry picker of a news truck. The family, including Myril's psychologist daughter, Joan Lehigh, also attended President Clinton's first inaugural in 1993.

Myril speaks with great pride of her son David Axelrod and his role as chief strategist in facilitating the victory of Barak Obama. "How many people can say that they achieved their

dream? David's was to sell a candidate for his positive attributes and he did that with Obama. How fortunate for any parent to witness her child's achieving such a goal! Myril adds.

Bennett recalls the inspiration she felt when attending Obama's speech in Boston following the candidate's N.H. primary loss. Her son had arranged for her to attend the event. She found the mood of the participants to be somber after the defeat until Obama spoke and lifted their spirits. "He was so welcoming and inspiring. He always seems so calm.," she recalled.

Bennett added that her son's deep involvement in the campaign sometimes left her awestruck. "I can't believe that David was making all those decisions that would ultimately impact the lives of so many," she says.

Myril describes the inauguration as "an experience of a lifetime. Everyone is so hopeful!"

*Mazel Tov* to Myril and family from CBI. May you go from strength to strength.



Myril Bennett is pictured above with designer David Josef who created her inaugural gown.

## MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS

### MEET JERRY HECHT

When Jerry Hecht is presenting a well researched d'var torah, *davening*, or teaching a religious school class, his knowledge of and zest for Judaism clearly infuses each of these activities. Involvement in synagogue worship and education is not new for Jerry who grew up in Yonkers in a Conservative Jewish home and a largely Jewish neighborhood. Weekly Shabbat synagogue attendance was a consistent part of his life as was USY (United Synagogue Youth).

Jerry describes an almost idyllic Jewish childhood in which there was no conflict between his religious and secular worlds. Because of the demography of his community he never had to worry, he explains, about Little League conflicting with Shabbat.

In 1977, after graduating from law school, Jerry took his first job in Brewster, NY and moved to Danbury. One of his early priorities was making a synagogue affiliation. The United Jewish Center was his choice and he became an active participant in Shabbat services and the Young Singles Group. There he met Patty Cohen, a vivacious young Danbury woman who shared his enthusiasm for Judaism---and the rest is history. Patty has expressed her Judaic commitment through leadership at UJC and active involvement in the National Council of Jewish Women on a local and National Board level. Jerry and Patty have two young adult sons, Josh and Matt.

Continuing education is an integral part of Jerry's life and he describes himself as incorporating the Hebrew concept of *limnud*, learning for its own sake and pleasure. To this end Jerry, who has a private law practice in Danbury, studies the *chumash* daily, seeking "nuggets" of wisdom that are applicable to his personal life. In his weekly teaching of middle school age children at Southbury's B'nai Israel and high school children in Tarrytown, he works hard to demonstrate the relevance of Judaic teaching in their lives. Jerry

explains that he often feels like he is "selling Judaism" both to his students and to their parents--helping them to understand how their faith can guide and enrich their everyday lives.

As for our own B'nai Israel, Jerry is most enthusiastic about the participatory quality of our service, our wonderful Rabbi Nelly and the camaraderie within the membership. When asked what changes he would like to see, Jerry spontaneously answered, "Keep on doing what you're doing." And with committed participation with members like Jerry, we hope to continue doing what we're doing for many years to come.

### *Stew Leonard's* Gift Card Fundraising Program



Do your shopping at *Stew Leonard's* because the synagogue receives 5% (sometimes 10%) when you shop using the gift card(s).

Call Cheryl at the office (792-6161) for your gift card(s).

## FROM THE RABBI

Dear Friends,  
*Baruch Dayan HaEmet* – Blessed be the true Judge.



It is with sadness and deep sense of loss that the Conservative Movement mourns the passing of Rabbi Alan Lew z”l. Many of you have heard of him or read his books. *This Is Real And You Are Completely Unprepared* is one that I mention frequently in our talks and discussions before *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. I studied meditation with him at a retreat I attended at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center. Below are excerpts of the article that appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle on January 13th.

Rabbi Alan Lew, who helped cultivate a spirituality bridging Judaism and Buddhism and left a legacy of social activism in the Bay Area, died unexpectedly Monday while visiting the East Coast.

Lew, 65, apparently died while on a jog, said Rabbi Micah Hyman, who leads Congregation Beth Sholom, the Richmond District synagogue from where Lew had retired and was still rabbi emeritus.

"It's a huge, huge loss," Hyman said. "In our community, the wave of shock is just beginning to take effect."

Lew's coming of age as a Jew actually happened as he sought to deepen his Zen Buddhist practice. Disillusioned by the Judaism he'd experienced as a child, Lew was considering becoming ordained as a lay Buddhist priest, according to a 1995 interview that was published in the *J.*, a weekly newspaper serving the Bay Area Jewish community.

But he found himself unable to sew a priestly garment while on a retreat in the 1970s at Tassajara, a Zen center in Carmel Valley. As he meditated on that resistance, Lew told the *J.* that "there was some sense of conflict between my being ordained as a Buddhist with my being Jewish." It became a turning point, leading Lew toward Judaism, and ultimately to rabbinical school.

In 1991, Lew became the rabbi at Congregation Beth Sholom, a Conservative synagogue where he would broaden the definition of Jewish practice and include meditation. There is a meditation room at the synagogue.

"He taught us that meditation was part of our heritage," said Marilyn Heiss, 54, a member who meditates. "He learned his meditation from Zen, but made it an integral part of Jewish practice."

## SCHEDULE OF SHABBAT SERVICES

*Services begin at 9:30 a.m.*

✧ **Shabbat, 13 Shevat, February 7, B'Shalah:**

Crossing the sea and singing for joy!

*Haftarah:* Judges 4:4-5:31

✧ **Shabbat, 20 Shevat, February 14, Yitro:** Standing at Sinai and receiving the Word of God.

*Haftarah:* Isaiah 6:1-7:6:9:5-6

✧ **Shabbat, 27 Shevat, February 21, Mishpatim:**

Sealing the Sinai Covenant and receiving the Code of Civil Law. *Haftarah:* II Kings 12:1-17

✧ **Shabbat, 4 Adar, February 28, 9 Terumah:**

The Israelites are instructed to build a sanctuary to house the two tablets and to serve as a center for worship. *Haftarah:* I Kings 5:26-6:13

✧ **Shabbat, 11 Adar, March 7, Tetzaveh:** Moshe and Aaron are instructed about the intricate designs of the priestly vestments.

*Haftarah:* I Samuel 15:2-34

## CANDLE LIGHTING

February 6, 2009:	4:58 P.M.
February 13, 2009:	5:06 P.M.
February 20, 2009:	5:15 P.M.
February 27, 2009:	5:23 P.M.
March 6, 2009:	5:32 P.M.
March 13, 2009:	6:39 P.M.

## YAHARZEITS

**24 Shevat, February 18, 2009**

Saul Ripps (Dr. Ron Ripps)

**25 Shevat, February 19, 2009**

Henry Heiden (Cory Heiden)

**4 Adar, February 28, 2009**

Maria Frankle (Rabbi Judy Frankle)

**5 Adar, March 1, 2009**

Mary Faust (Betty F. Feldman)

**8 Adar, March 4, 2009**

Marian Barbara Feldman (Bonnie Kasiarz)

**9 Adar, March 5, 2009**

Beatrice Hermann (Patricia Weiner)

**14 Adar, March 10, 2009**

Fred Stein (Michael Stein)

## THANKS! THANKS!

**For the General Fund**

✧ Dina and Sam Markind in memory of Simon Markind

✧ Jay Seifert in memory of his wife Helen

**For the Mentor in Residence Fund**

✧ Sara Kruzansky in memory of her father Max Schuster

**For Their Generous Kiddush**

✧ Rabbi Nelly and Mark Altenburger in honor of Rabbi Nelly's birthday

✧ Ellen and Larry Dubois in honor of the new administration

✧ Pam Lampell, Susan Tritter and Paul Simon in honor of the inauguration

✧ Dina and Sam Markind in honor of Matan's trip to Israel

✧ The Cahn's to honor the CBI community