

# Synagogue at Malden Bridge



Shvat- Adar II 5760

Volume I, Number 1

February/ March 2000

## **Message from President Larry Machiz**

While we have not reached the Promised Land, at the very least, we will wander no longer. Our encampment in Malden Bridge allows us to reflect on our travels and count our blessings. In addition to our lovely home, as you can see, we have now a newsletter under the editorial direction of Sy Balsen. In time, it is my expectation that you will find this bi-monthly newsletter to be useful, enjoyable, and engaging. This particular column will be a podium for the Synagogue's executives to speak to you. We will rotate the authorship of this column among the officers, bringing a fresh voice to you with each newsletter. As President, I lead off.

I begin at the beginning, which for us was in Nassau. I have been asked many times why we left Nassau. Over the course of months of argument and debate, there developed an impasse that would not be bridged. Many of us felt that a decision for expansion was overdue and we yearned for a place to have weddings and a Hebrew school. As time went on, what appeared to be a dispute over size and shape revealed itself to be a deeper fracture about change in general and about control. Those of us who were clamoring for growth would no longer devote the energy that was necessary to find and fundraise for alternative or complementary space without the certainty that such efforts would be acted upon. The decision to secede from Nassau was not quick in coming nor was it easy to make, each of us had strong emotional ties to Nassau: some of our children became Bar-Mitzvah or Bat-Mitzvah there, many of us said Kaddish there, we all had developed friendships there and we all loved the

building and its heritage. Once all the rational arguments in favor and in opposition to expansion were distilled down to issues of change and control, there was no longer that much to talk about. At the end of the summer, Fred announced his resignation, and we accelerated our efforts at formation. Incorporation, bylaws, bank accounts, check books, siddurim, chumashim, a Torah, permanent space, temporary space, and on and on. These things consumed us. There were attempts at reconciliation even after the split, but the seminal issues of change and control were not to be resolved. We were committed to developing a more equitable relationship with Fred Rheingold. Primarily, this meant two things: fairer compensation and increasing participation from the congregation in the conduct of services. Although we are spreading these obligations over a smaller base than before, we have so far managed to meet our goals. Thanks particularly to Bernie Kukoff and Diane Leibovitz for leading our services from time to time.

We davened for the month of November at the recreation center in Schodack and then through a contact of Sy Balsen's, we were invited to meet with the Pastor and trustees of Wesley United Methodist Church in Malden Bridge. A more welcome reception we couldn't have asked for. Pastor Zittel opened the meeting with a prayer for brotherhood; speaking to our commonality he invoked the names of the patriarchs and quoted from the Shema. What we had expected to be an exploratory meeting, turned out to be something quite different. The Pastor formally proposed a sharing of their facility. He had already obtained approval from his ecclesiastical authorities. He and the WUMC trustees recognized that Christian symbols would make us uncomfortable and offered that they

could be covered or stored during our services. Through the efforts of Sy Balsen, Fred Rheingold, Charles Lieber and me and the pastor and WUMC's legal counsel, a written Memorandum of Understanding was developed that sets forth the practical and aspirational elements of our relationship. It was an exhilarating experience. The experience with WUMC while uplifting, was also chastening, because it raised questions about relations left behind in Nassau. Since then we have made efforts to abandon any issues that divide us from our friends in Nassau and they have reciprocated. Now, there is every reason to think that we can cooperate on future endeavors. Nassau is not in jeopardy and more people are working harder for the two shuls than before.

At this stage, we are poised to begin the work to fulfill our more expansive view of what our shul will be. Plans are in the works for films, lectures and concerts. Our High Holyday services (which will be held in the sanctuary) are already being planned. Our recent TuB'Shvat seder was an ecumenical success (see Pastor Zittel's letter on page 3). Our Shabbat services continue as always, with vibrant discussions of Torah and Midrash that are as interesting to those with little background as they are to the scholars among us. Our real jewels are our people. Our board of trustees and supporting volunteers are as solid and diverse a group as has ever been assembled for such a purpose. Universally, they are smart, talented, idealistic and committed. So that you better know them, we have compiled a nutshell profile of each of our trustees on page 3. Again and again, in my mind's ear, I hear Dr. Panitch say that it is a mitzvah to form a shul. There is yet so much to do. If you would like to play a role, large or small, please volunteer.

## Fred Rheingold on the Haftarat

Each week in shul we spend a large amount of the time on Shabbat morning on the Torah discussion. On any given Shabbat, this is the largest part of the service. Usually, by the time we read the haftarah from the Prophets, we are eyeing the clock and listening to our stomachs growl as we glance over at the Fairway bags full of great food for Kiddush. So we read the haftarah without much comment.

Looking over the haftarat for Pesach, it made me appreciate the treasure that they are for us. Not only are they great each on their own as the product of inspired prophets and leaders, they are also the result of equally inspired editors who chose which section of the prophetic literature would be read on a particular Shabbat or Yom Tov. The Torah readings for Pesach are the obvious ones- the preparations and escape from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea and the redemption of the Israelites.

These may be compared to the melody. The haftarat are the counter melody or the harmony. They take themes of the Torah readings and give them additional emphasis. In the case of Pesach where the Torah readings are so dramatic it is easy to forget or bypass some of the important lessons of the holiday.

The haftarah for the first day is from the book of Joshua. The Israelites are just entering the land of Canaan after forty years. The manna, which sustained them, stops and the Israelites must now live off the produce of the land as "ordinary" humans rather than having their sustenance delivered to their front tent doors as in the stay in the desert. The Israelite males all had to undergo circumcision since they had not circumcised themselves during their wandering in the desert.

On the second day we read from the Book of Kings of another renewal in the days of King Josiah, some six hundred years after Moses. The newly discovered book of the Covenant is read to the people who now realize how much they have neglected of the Torah. They destroy all the idols and idolatrous altars and rededicate themselves anew to the Torah. The haftarah states that on that Pesach of this rededication, a sacrifice was offered that was so memorable because such a Passover offering had not been offered since the days of the Judges who judged Israel and all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.

On the Shabbat of Pesach, we read from Ezekiel who prophesied in the dark days of the Babylonian exile that the people of Israel would be resurrected from the Valley of the Dry bones, be given new flesh and life and renew their national existence.

On the last day of Pesach, there is the famous messianic vision of Isaiah, "a wolf will dwell with a sheep, and the dispersed ones of Judah will he gather in from the four corners of the earth."

When we take all of these haftarat together, we read a unified message even though they were written by different authors separated by centuries of time from each other. The miracles of one generation are not enough to keep the dream alive. Every generation has its lapses and it is up to that generation or the next to repair those lapses and to

renew the spirit of the first generations. Nothing can be taken for granted and inertia is the enemy. What the previous generation let slip (circumcision in the book of Joshua and the prohibition of idols in the days of Josiah) must be corrected by the next. We cannot depend upon obvious miracles- the manna disappeared as they entered the Land of Canaan but must proceed with the hope that God is behind us- and perhaps not out front readily discernible. There will be periods of failure and destruction as during the Babylonian Exile, but there will be resurrections as predicted by Ezekiel. Finally, we hope that we reach a stage where we may be able to say along with Isaiah, "Exult and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for the Holy One of Israel has done greatly among you."



## Board Member Profiles

•Sy Balsen, a school psychologist and photographer, and his wife Karen, a librarian, have lived in Columbia County since 1977. They have three children, Zev (19) is currently volunteering with AmeriCorps NCCC and will be attending Yale University in the fall; Lily (16) and Alex (13) attend Albany Academy. Lily has sung and acted in school and local productions. Sy's parents were Polish immigrants who survived World War II in Siberia. Karen's father immigrated from Poland before the war, served in WW II with the US Army, was captured in North Africa and was in a German Prisoner of War camp until it was liberated by Russian troops. Sy spoke only Yiddish until he started kindergarten.

•Mark Dickerman is a screenwriter and the Chair of The Department of Dramatic Writing, Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. His wife, Hallie Halpern is the proprietor of Hallie Halpern Art Conservation in East Chatham. Her business is paintings restoration and she has maintained a studio here since 1990, when the family moved to Red Rock from New York, where they still maintain a small apartment on Bleecker Street. Mark and Hallie have two sons, Jesse, 19, and Jake, 15. Jesse and Jake were Bar Mitzvahed in the shul in Nassau. Jesse attends Rice University in Houston. Jake is a sophomore at Chatham High School.

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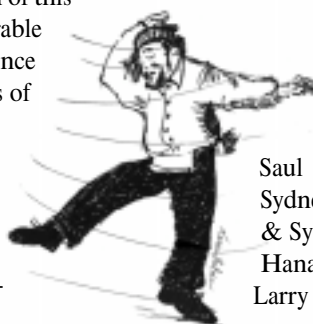


## Donations

Saul & Elayne Cohen, Delores Cartiff, Katherine Houk, Sydney Chavin, Carolyn Allen, Gustave & Eve Weiss, Karen & Sy Balsen, Bennet & Sharon Cohen, Yehuda & Hannah Hanani, Bernie & Lydia Kukoff, Charles & Mimi Lieber, Larry & Janie Machiz, Burt & Alice Swersey.

## Kiddush Hosts

- February 19: Hanani : In celebration of Charles Lieber's birthday
- February 26: Rheingold: In commemoration of Oscar Rheingold's Yahrtzeit
- March 4: Gelb/ Levine
- March 11: Machiz
- March 19: Dickerman
- March 25: Swersey



## Board Member Profiles

(continued from page 2)

- Alan Gelb is a writer who first experienced Columbia County as a weekender, back in 1985, and became a full-time resident during his writing of *Most Likely To Succeed*, an account of the Wyley Gates murder case. He lives in East Chatham with his wife, Karen Levine, a writer and member of the Chatham Board of Education. They have two sons, Noah, a 1997 graduate of Chatham High School, now a junior at Brown University, and Nathaniel (14), currently in eighth grade at Chatham Middle School. Both boys became Bar-Mitzvah at Nassau.
- Yehuda Hanani is internationally recognized as a performer, pedagogue and ambassador for the arts. He performs as soloist with orchestras, in recital, as chamber musician, and conducts masterclasses and seminars worldwide. He is Professor of Cello at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory, a faculty member of the Aspen Music Festival, and Artistic Director of the Close Encounters With Music series in South Florida and the Berkshires. He and his wife, Hannah, are residents of Spencertown, New York; their son, Benjamin, is a senior at Swarthmore College.
- Lydia Kukoff is a Jewish communal professional, writer and lecturer. She and her husband Bernie, a theatrical producer, divide their time between their apartment in New York City and their home in Nassau. They have two grown children, David, a screenwriter, and Naomi, a singer-songwriter and two grandchildren, Zachary and Alexandria.

- Diane Leibovitz has been a part time resident of Stephentown since 1980. She spends her week days in NYC and week ends in Stephentown. In NYC she works as an Operations manager for MTA/ NYCT in the Division of Car Equipment. She is also attending The Academy for Jewish Religion where she is studying for the rabbinate. Her son and his family live in Copake and her granddaughter Sarah often comes to Shabbat services with her.
- Jody Leopold is a portrait sculptor who has been in the area since 1989. In addition to her art work with family and shul member Alan D'Leo, she works with her husband, Fred Rheingold, on the family farm.
- Larry Machiz is a real estate attorney. He moved to this area in 1986 after practicing in New York City. His home is in Ghent, which he shares with his wife Janie, an artist, and three sons Joshua (17), Sam (16) and Isaiah (8). Josh and Sam became Bar-Mitzvah at Nassau and now go to Chatham High School. Isaiah goes to Hawthorne Valley School.
- Alice Swersey teaches music both in the public elementary school and at her home studio in Stephentown, NY. She and husband Burt live at Shadowbrook Farm, a wholesale plant nursery specializing in rhododendrons, azaleas and other flowering shrubs. The Swerseys are now full time residents of the area, having moved from Westchester County 12 years ago. Alice divides her time between here and Manhattan where her two daughters, son and daughter-in-law, granddaughter and parents, ages 100 (father) and 91 (mother) reside
- Charles D. Lieber and his wife, Mimi, have homes in Spencertown and Manhattan. They have four adult children and one grandchild, with one more on the way. A past chairman of the Reconstructionist movement and president of the (Manhattan) West Side Jewish Community Council, Charles is the president of Hebrew Publishing Company, a firm founded in 1892 and now located in Spencertown.



WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AT MALDEN BRIDGE  
NORTH CHATHAM UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
P.O. Box 107, North Chatham, New York 12132-0107  
Email: [info@wumc.net](mailto:info@wumc.net)  
Phone: (518) 795-3035

January 28, 2000

Diane Leibovitz  
Treasurer  
The Synagogue at Malden Bridge  
Malden Bridge, New York, 12115

Dear Diane,

This is to officially thank you and your entire congregation for your generous and gracious contribution to our roof fund. When I made the announcement at our service last Sunday our congregation spontaneously responded with enthusiastic applause. We are especially appreciative of the notion that you "desire to share the burdens as well as the joys of our relationship."

Speaking of the joys, we also owe your congregation and particularly Fred Rheingold a hearty word of thanks for including us in your recent Tu B'Shvat seder. I counted 15 people from among the two congregations I serve. Several passed comments to me on the depth and richness of the experience. Our young people all agreed that the evening was "really neat" and seemed especially impressed by the use of written spoken and sung Hebrew. All seemed greatly pleased and delighted to have been able to experience this spiritually delightful and ecologically meaningful celebration.

Again, on behalf of the trustees and the people of the Wesley Church, thank you so much for your wonderful gift and your marvelous presence within our community!

With God's Grace and Peace,

  
Robert J. Zittel, pastor



## Passover Matchmaker

Need a place to go for Passover? Several Synagogue members have offered to host families who do not have their own seder or feel that they may not know enough to conduct their own. Alice Swersey will be acting at the "matchmaker, so call her at 733-5092 if you are interested.



## TuB'Shvat

Until we moved up to Columbia County we had no idea what a TuB'Shvat seder was. We came to enjoy this agricultural and ecological holiday in Nassau, but never enjoyed it more than we did on Saturday night, January 22, as the Synagogue at Malden Bridge celebrated its first holiday together as a congregation. Part of what made this such a special celebration was the fact that we were joined by members of the Wesley Methodist Church. All fifty of us sang songs and went through the seder talking about fruits with seeds on the outside and seeds on the inside, mixing red wine with white and thinking about the rising sap and the coming of Spring. Thank you Fred, Alice and Diane for pulling this together so beautifully.

-Karen Levine

# March/ April 2000

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Megillah Reading: March 20 at 6:30 PM			<b>1</b> 24 Adar I	<b>2</b> 25	<b>3</b> 26	<b>4</b> Vayakhel 27
<b>5</b> 28	<b>6</b> 29	<b>7</b> 30	<b>8</b> 1 Adar II	<b>9</b> 2	<b>10</b> 3	<b>11</b> Pekudei 4
<b>12</b> 5	<b>13</b> 6	<b>14</b> 7	<b>15</b> 8	<b>16</b> 9	<b>17</b> 10	<b>18</b> Vayikra 11
<b>19</b> 12	<b>20</b> Erev Purim 13	<b>21</b> 14	<b>22</b> 15	<b>23</b> 16	<b>24</b> 17	<b>25</b> Tzav 18
<b>26</b> 19	<b>27</b> 20	<b>28</b> 21	<b>29</b> 22	<b>30</b> 23	<b>31</b> 24	

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Shabbat Services every Saturday at 9:45 AM						<b>1</b> Shmini 25 Adar II
<b>2</b> 26	<b>3</b> 27	<b>4</b> 28	<b>5</b> 29	<b>6</b> 1 Nisan	<b>7</b> 2	<b>8</b> Tazriah 3
<b>9</b> 4	<b>10</b> 5	<b>11</b> 6	<b>12</b> 7	<b>13</b> 8	<b>14</b> 9	<b>15</b> Metzarah 10
<b>16</b> 11	<b>17</b> 12	<b>18</b> 13	<b>19</b> Erev Pesach 14	<b>20</b> 15	<b>21</b> 16	<b>22</b> 17
<b>23</b> 18	<b>24</b> 19	<b>25</b> 20	<b>26</b> 21	<b>27</b> 22	<b>28</b> 23	<b>29</b> Acharei Mot 24
<b>30</b> 25	Passover Services: April 20, 21, 22 (Shabbat), 26, 27(Yizkor) at 9:30 AM					

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge  
 Box 18  
 Malden Bridge, New York 12115