

# The Synagogue at Malden Bridge

Elul-Tishri-Heshvan 5762 Volume III, Number 1 September/October 2001

## Member of the Wedding

By Alan Gelb

It is customary for a synagogue to welcome a Torah as a bride. In doing so, we recall the “wedding” of Hashem and the people of Israel that took place at the base of Mount Sinai back when we were wandering in the desert. And so, as our synagogue made ready to welcome its new bride—the Torah that was joining us officially on August 26, 2001—we did what anyone would do on the morning of a wedding. We checked to see what the weather was like.

In fact, the weather was perfect. It was one of those late summer days in Columbia County when the grass is utterly green and the sky is intensely blue and there is a soft breeze blowing. As our congregation gathered on the front lawn of the home of members Arthur and Elaine Greenberg, across from the post office in Malden Bridge, there was an excitement and conviviality that reinforced the idea of a wedding. We were all wedding guests at a very special wedding party and there was our bride, being “given away” by representatives of Congregation Or Shalom of Orange, Connecticut, where

she had formerly resided.

Three klezmer musicians—an accordion, a flute, and a clarinet—kicked off the procession that led from the Malden Bridge P.O. down to the Synagogue. We were 120 strong as we followed the bride. She was carried underneath a *huppah* crafted from a *tal-lit*, over the Kinderhook Creek, and into her new home.

As we sang songs of praise for our new Torah, the bride metaphor kept building. When you thought about it, our Torah was a kind of mail-order bride. Born in Russia in the 1920s, she had made the intrepid journey to the U.S., most likely in the hold of a ship, and then came many years of living in the Nutmeg State. Now she had come to this part of the world where scrolls were so scarce and so sought after. Although Malden Bridge had its very own Jewish settlement, called Moshers Mills, back in the 19th century, no Torah had ever settled in this immediate vicinity before. And no such procession had ever marched down the main thoroughfare of Malden Bridge before.

Since our inception as a synagogue 22 months ago, we had wondered when and how we would be able to acquire a Torah of our own. Now the generosity of the Peseckis family, honoring their

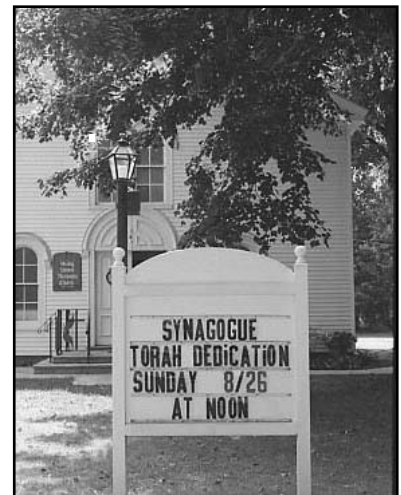
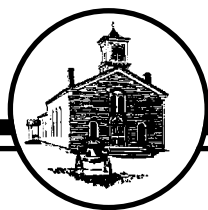


photo by Dale Eva Gelfand

father and grandfather, H. Irwin Levey, on the occasion of his 75th birthday, had made this happen for us. Generosity abounded all over: from other donors to our Torah fund; from our members who gave so much of their time, including some who have to be mentioned specially, like Steve Ostrow, who built the beautiful ark, Mark Feder who coordinated all of the food, and our President, Lydia Kukoff, who masterminded the entire event; and from

*The Synagogue at Malden Bridge is located at the Wesley United Methodist Church in Malden Bridge, New York at the intersection of Albany Turnpike and Shaker Museum Road. (518-392-0701)*



our dear friends of the Wesley United Methodist Church, who magically and consistently create a feeling of privacy and comfort for us whenever we need it. We are indebted as well to Rabbi Gedalya Druin, the charismatic *sofer* who made the *shiddach* between SMB and Congregation Or Shalom. Rabbi Druin returned the bride to immaculate condition for the occasion and captivated us with his reflections on what the Torah means to the experience of being Jewish.

As befits any wedding, there was much dancing and singing and cookies and cake. Children cried and elderly people had to sit down. Those who made the wedding sat down too, at the end, in delighted post-nuptial exhaustion as they reviewed the events of the

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day. We had come to a threshold. We have been a growing family for almost two years now. From a cluster of fewer than a dozen people, we now number more than 50 member families, and there are many more in our extended family who join us at our films and lectures and, we hope, will join us as members too one day. But now our family has been immeasurably enriched by the coming of this bride, who will always be a part of us and our history.

For our second High Holy Days as a congregation, we have a Sefer Torah of our own.



photo by Dale Eva Gelfand

Our Congregation followed the Torah over Malden Bridge to its new home..



photo by Dale Eva Gelfand

The scroll is unrolled for everyone to see, in front of the ark designed and built by Steve Ostrow.



# Point of View

## Replacement Parts...part 1

By Carol Weir

This past June, at the age of 63, in relatively good health and against the well-meaning advice of my children, I decided to serve as a volunteer at an army base in Israel. The reaction of my friends alternated between “crazy” and “gutsy.” The question everyone asked was “Why go at a time like this?” and my answer was the suicide bombing in June of the Dolphinarium social club in Tel Aviv, where 21 young people lost their lives. Although not really observant, and not even able to read Hebrew at that moment in time, it seemed imperative for me to show solidarity with my fellow Jews in Israel. For everything there is a season, I thought. What would Judaism be without Israel?

And so, excited and scared, I called the New York office of Volunteers for Israel, the American branch of Sar-El. Sar-El is the Hebrew acronym for “Sherut Le-Israel” – i.e. Service for Israel, and was founded in 1982 in the middle of the Lebanon War, by General Aharon Davidi, a scholar and the former head of the paratroop corps. In 1982, the Golan Heights settlements faced losing their entire agricultural crop. The majority of able-bodied settlers were called into Army reserve service and entire plantations, with crops already ripened, were left unattended due to the acute manpower shortage. Volunteers were needed in the fields, and hundreds came, mostly from America at that time.

Over the years, volunteers from over 25 countries have come to serve. The goals of the project remain the same: through manual work, to create an opportunity for Diaspora Jewry and for other friends of Israel to assist in the rebuilding of Israel and to strengthen the bond and sense of solidarity. Our manual work makes us replacements for reservists, who are then free to do other things. Today, sixty per cent of the volunteers are not Jewish, but have a love for Israel.

The weeks between June and July passed quickly. The office of VFI arranged for my airline ticket and gave me packing instructions. “Travel light,” the brochure told me, “you

just in case. I added a short run to my daily walk, and I even managed a few sit-ups. At night, I joined an Israeli chat-line to make some acquaintances. The Israelis were surprised to hear that an American woman, a grandmother, was coming to Israel during what they called “the situation.” “Kol ha kavod,” my new faceless friend from Israel said on-line, when I told her I would be a volunteer at an IDF base. “All honor to you for what you are doing, coming to Israel at this time.”

As more and more incidents of terrorism took place in July, I kept that phrase in my mind: “Kol ha kavod,” I repeated to myself, when I heard the alarming news and considered canceling the trip. Finally, the time came for serious packing: good sneakers, some

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won't need much clothing, maybe just some underwear and tee shirts, because you will be wearing an army uniform and boots during the work week.” Where exactly was I going, I asked, to a desert area, to the mountains? And what would I be doing? Their answers were short and to the point: “You will be sent where you are needed, and do what needs doing, some type of manual work.”

In the few weeks remaining before my departure, I tried to get in shape,

liquid detergent, sun cream. Family and friends offered me things to take: a Swiss Army knife, a flashlight, some trail mix for snacks, and a roll of toilet paper, just in case. At the last minute, I redid my will, just in case.

On July 22nd, I arrived at Ben Gurion airport. The sun was shining and I was in Israel. Scattered throughout the airport were the other twenty members of my group and we met for the first time. Geographically diverse, from California, Washington State,



Illinois, Miami and New York, we ranged in age from 18 to 76. There was a mother-daughter team, and a grandfather-grandson pair as well. Our occupations included two doctors, one lawyer (myself), one law student, several teachers, a few college students and retirees. Unsure of what to do next, we waited for our madricha to arrive. The madricha is a leader in the educational division of the IDF and would be assigned to us for our three-week tour of duty. Sure enough, as we gathered our baggage, Lena arrived in

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uniform, slim, young (19), pretty, and with the usual M16 rifle swung over her shoulders. “Get on the bus, guys,” she said (she always called us “guys”), and we carried our bags to our bus, destination unknown. Once on the bus, we became acquainted with each other. “Why have you come?” we asked one another. The answer was almost always the same. Because it’s time to come to Israel. After an alternately smooth and bumpy ride for two hours, we saw signs for Haifa; soon thereafter, we arrived at our base, Camp Kurdani, about twenty miles from the coast, a barren stretch of land, ringed with barbed wire and home to trucks, tanks and warehouses.

*(To be continued in next issue...)*

# Community Saturdays at Malden Bridge

By Lucile Lichtblau

The Chinese say that a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. Our journey to the Synagogue at Malden Bridge began several years ago on the first night of Rosh Hashana when a neighbor of ours told us about a nice Reform temple in Nassau. We arrived at 8 p.m. (Reform time) as Fred and a couple of other people were locking up. Like all the best journeys, we didn’t know we were making one, had in any event packed the wrong clothes and left the itinerary at home.

After this inauspicious beginning we got our times straightened out and began attending High Holy Days “in the country” at what we now realized was a Conservative shul.

Almost a year ago we decided to jump in and attend Saturday morning services at Malden Bridge. We had nothing to lose but our ignorance, which, thanks to the remarkable people at our synagogue, has not been an impediment. We are learning slowly and sometimes painfully about our own religion in all its barbarity, brilliance, wisdom, originality and sometimes sheer craziness. The word *meshugaas* is, after all, our very own.

In addition to the Torah itself, our teachers are our fellow congregants, who patiently, week after week, instruct, debate, discuss and in gener-

al struggle with the text along-side us. The parallel between all of us trying to understand a document that is thousands of years old and our ancestors trying to understand the task that was set before them in Egypt and the wilderness is sometimes only too clear.

We have come to look forward to our Saturday mornings as a weekly treat or perhaps a retreat from our everyday world. They are special. We talk about them in the car on the way home, in the living-room after dinner and in the kitchen spooning out the nighttime frozen yogurt. They are a part of our lives. When we miss a week, we feel it.

Now, when we light the candles on Friday night, take a sip of wine and eat our challah we look in a different way at our week, at our world and the people in it. We are more careful and caring about what we do. We are more thoughtful about our priorities.

There is a painting, perhaps by Chagall, depicting a family sitting around the table on a Friday night. The family seems to whirl in a timeless space, celebrating Shabbat at that moment and also forever; separate from but still a part of the rest of the world. I think of our Saturday mornings in much the same way. We are there; we are trying to get there. The journey to Saturday is ongoing.



# From the Board

By Lydia Kukoff

This time of year—the Hebrew month of Elul—is a time of reckoning. Traditional Jews blow the shofar each morning to awaken their souls to the inner searching, the *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, necessary for *tshuvah*, turning/repentance, in preparation for the High Holy Days.

My calendar is one way I begin to do my reckoning. At this time of year I change calendars, going from the fat, frayed old to the thin, pristine new. The notations on the pages of the past year are a short-hand of the year's experiences. Behind so many of them lie powerful memories that trigger feelings of joy, sadness, guilt, inadequacy, surprise, disappointment, discovery. Birthdays, anniversaries, *yahrzeits*, trips, dinners, lunches, meetings tell of my whereabouts on any given day but, of course, that's not the whole story.

As I look over the days, weeks and months of the year almost gone by, I think of people added who have come into my life that I didn't know a year



photo by Dale Eva Gelfand

*In May, Lydia succeeded Larry Machiz to become SMB's second President.*

ago. And I think of people subtracted whom I will never see again. I am writing this on my mother's birthday. I think of how much I miss her, about how much she gave me, and the things I never got to tell her, and the great-grandchildren she never lived to see.

I think always about my family—my husband, my children, my grandchildren, my siblings. Where did my actions this year bring me with each of them? My thoughts turn to people close to me

and I feel blessed by their friendship, and I feel guilty about friends with whom I have not maintained close-enough contact. And I think about what I did not do, or do enough, or do well enough.

No wonder my calendar is frayed!

Then I turn to my new calendar—as blank a slate as I can hope to have at this point in my life. I realize that this blank slate is really the gift that the High Holy Days gives to me. This period of

## Microcinema

On Saturday, September 29 at 8PM, we will be hosting a major local film event: our screening of a one-hour, stand-alone episode from **The Decalogue** by director Krzysztof Kieslowski, whose **Red, White, and Blue** trilogy was an international triumph. Originally made for Polish TV, **The Decalogue**—ten one-hour films inspired by the Ten Commandments—has been called “the great film achievement of the last decade” by **Time Magazine**. The episode we will

be showing is entitled “Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness” and concerns a Jewish child offered sanctuary during the Holocaust on the condition that she obtain a certificate of baptism. Film critic Roger Ebert says, “Watch them one at a time...if you are lucky to have someone to talk to, you discuss them and learn about yourself.” Let us all invite a friend and learn about ourselves that evening.

Saturday, November 10 at 8PM, bring the whole family for director Barry Levinson's autobiographical **Avalon**. This wonderfully expansive account of growing up in a large Jewish immigrant family in Baltimore stars Aidan Quinn and Joan Plowright.



soul-searching that begins in the month of *Elul* and continues through *Yom Kippur* offers us the opportunity to take a giant step back in order to reflect on the past year and try to be deeply honest in our own self-understanding and in our dealings with others. It is a time set aside to set things straight. This opportunity is called “*tshuva*.”

Before I can make any entries in my calendar or begin to step into the new year, I must go through the process of *tshuva*.

*Tshuva.*

The prospect of it feels overwhelming. Where do I start? How will I ever get it all in? Create a new group on my e-mail with the subject-heading “apologies”? Have a series of regret dinners with loved ones I may have hurt during the year? Serve humble pie for dessert?

Judaism teaches that *tshuva* does not begin with the apology to the other; it begins within the self. It begins within me. Our tradition directs me to four steps that I must go through to achieve *tshuva*.

First, I must go deep inside myself and identify what I did wrong, including acknowledging the rationalization that I used in order to validate the behavior. Second, I have to uproot that behavior and the rationalization. Only after I have done that internal work can I approach the person I wronged

and offer a sincere apology. Finally, I must firmly resolve never to repeat the behavior again.

*Tshuva* might be seen to relate to the negative, since it focuses on shortcomings, missing the mark and remorse. Too seldom do we appreciate the opportunity that *tshuva* affords us and the optimism inherent in the process.

There is a midrash that teaches that *tshuva* is one of the things that God created before creating the world.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a great con-

temporary sage, teaches that there are two implications of this idea. One is that *tshuva* is embedded in the root structure of the world. The other is that before we were created, we were given the possibility of changing the course of our lives.

As we enter this new year of 5762, may we all succeed in the inner searchings of our hearts and may we be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of sweetness, health, peace and fulfillment.



photo by Dale Eva Gelfand

Rabbi Gedalya Druin, the *sofer* who made the match between our Congregation and Congregation Or Shalom, spoke about “the real thing.”

## Conversation Pieces

By Alan Gelb

On two successive Thursdays in August, SMB hosted informal lectures by two authors whose books have recently been published to critical acclaim.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, a Princeton social historian, whose book, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*, chronicles the role of clothing in the making of modern Americans, “tailored” a presentation into an often hilarious look at the way Jewish magazines and organizations sought to temper the Jewish woman’s predilection for showy jewelry.

Dr. Elisabeth Gitter, author of *The Imprisoned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, The Original Deaf-Blind Girl*. Dr. Gitter, Professor of English at John Jay College of the City University of New York and a part-time New Lebanon resident, read excerpts from her book and recalled the genesis of her project, when she explored the archives of the Perkins School for the Blind and stumbled across an authentic Charles Dickens letter.

SMB thanks Dr. Joselit and Dr. Gitter (a new member), as well as our host, the Shaker Museum in Old Chatham. Stay tuned for upcoming Conversation Pieces in October, April and next summer.



# Members' News

## THANK YOU...

•Fred Rheingold, Esther Feder, Steve Ostrow, Janie Machiz, Sarah Shapiro, Ben Borkovitz, Elaine and Arthur Greenberg, Jodie Leopold, Fred Rheingold, Janet and George Carey, Sydell and Joe Roth, Gloria Kaufman, Mark Dickerman, Dale Gelfand and Sy Balsen for all of their dedicated work in preparation of our Torah dedication ceremony.

•George Carey, Larry Machiz and Sy Balsen for their work on our High Holy Day transliteration book.

•Ginger Feldman for coordinating the new and prospective members' brunch.

•Joanne and Haskell Klaristenfeld for opening their home to us for services and a beautiful kiddush.

## MAZAL TOV...

•Alice and Bert Swersey, whose daughter, Sarah, will be married to Jeff Wagenheim on October 7.

•George and Janet Carey on the birth of their grandson, Moses.

•Lucile Lichtblau on the October 8 reading of her play, "Break a Leg." Call her for details: 201-567-7153.

## NEW MEMBERS

Elisabeth and Max Gitter, Florence and Bernard Mehl, Lois and Gerald Staffin, Annette Schickman, Joyce and Charles Sarnet.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

•Maurice and Charlotte Abramowitz, in honor of Arthur Greenberg's 70th birthday.

•H. Irwin Levey in honor of the Peseckis family..

•Fred and Ellen Levine

•The many FOLMs (friends of Larry Machiz) who made contributions in his honor.



## A Poem by Bernie Kukoff

### Yom Kippur

*For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you from all your sins...and ye shall afflict your souls...*

Kol Nidre night. This is it! No turning back! No food for the next 25 hours, my first whole day fast ever because

Jackie Yellen and me dared each other.

But he doesn't like food as much as me. He swallows it fast, doesn't keep it in his mouth chewing as long as me, corned beef, pickle, potato salad, cream soda, mixing it all up. Yellen eats the pickle by itself. That's ridiculous.

The Chazzan is doing Kol Nidre in that crying voice making all the mothers and grandmothers in the women's section cry.

I see my mother cry. Why? What's she got to worry about?

She's the holiest person I know.

Much holier than my father.

He should be crying.

He smokes and goes to the track on Shabbos.

I squeeze my eyes shut trying to think of my sins, trying

to block out the brisket and noodle kugel chilling

in the refrigerator, like a safe with jewels that can't be cracked until after sundown tomorrow night.

Old men from Russia sniff tiny mounds of powdered tabac off shaking pinkies, sneeze their brains out, saying it makes you feel less hungry.

Maybe in Russia, I don't say, hallucinating

over our leftover roast chicken and potted meatballs.

*For all these, O God of Forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us remission.*

Everybody's up pounding their chests--

*For the sin we have committed before thee--*

*by slander  
by wanton looks  
by effrontery*

What's effrontery?

Forgive me, God, for the sin of

cursing too much,

copying off Silverstein's science test,

never waiting the whole six hours to eat ice cream after meat,

for the sin of not being able to really feel my sins.



# Hebrew School



## Turn... Turn... Turn...

By Nancy Rothman

There are many signs of a new season and the approach of a new year. The light changes, cicadas sing all day, tomatoes ripen into their promised perfection, Milt Meisner's corn (the only local organically grown!) is ready for harvest, Zvi Cohen's new bakery opens its doors in Chatham and The Synagogue at Malden Bridge begins a new and expanded year of Religious School.

We are very pleased to welcome Judy Soicher, an experienced, exuberant teacher from Richmond, Massachusetts, to shepherd our smallest treasures (ages 5-8) in a weekly Shabbat-morning Kitah Aleph class rich with songs, stories and age-appropriate activities. On alternate Shabbat mornings, Judy will also lead our family-oriented Jr. Congregation service with Sidra sto-

ries, prayer and songs for all, culminating, in Kiddush (always a savory experience!) at noon. The first Jr. Congregation is scheduled for Saturday, September 29. The first Kitah Aleph is October 6.

Beginning on October 4, Kitah Bet (for ages 9-11) continues with Fred Rheingold teaching Hebrew school on Thursdays from 4:30-6:00 PM and Jewish Culture and History on alternate Sunday mornings.

Saturday and Thursday classes will be held in SMB's current home in the Wesley United Methodist Church. Sunday classes will be held at the Shaker Museum. For registration and times, and confirmation of venue, please call our office at 518-392-0701.

Additionally, we have planned our

first Family Mitzvah Project on Sunday afternoon, October 7, from 2 to 5 PM. We will glean the remaining vegetables from harvested fields at Little Seed Gardens in Stuyvesant and Roxbury Farm in Kinderhook. We will donate the fruits of our harvest to local food pantries. We hope to see you all there. Directions will be provided.

A discussion/study group for older students is also in the works (ages 15-18), covering Jewish identity with a multicultural mien, and questions of ethics. This will be offered once a month at times to be announced.

So come and be welcomed. Sign up your favorite little punims for a class. Join us for a Jr. Congregation and Kiddush. Let the pleasures of Shabbat sweetly ease the way into your New Year.

## BULLETIN BOARD

### GRANT WRITER

•SMB qualifies for many grants, but we need someone with experience in grant writing to access them. If you can help, please contact Lydia Kukoff at 518-766-7389.

### E-MAIL LIST

•If you are not on the SMB e-mail list, please contact Alice Swersey at [abswersey@taconic.net](mailto:abswersey@taconic.net). You will then receive the Weekly Update, alerting you to all the interesting programs and events we have scheduled.

### BOOK GROUP

•We are organizing a Sunday morning book group to discuss books of Jewish interest. Call Lydia Kukoff for information at 518-766-7389.

### JEWISH CEMETARY

•Under the auspices of SMB, a Jewish cemetery is being created as part of an existing local cemetery. We need volunteers to serve on a committee that will work out the design issues. If you're interested, please call Alan Gelb at 518-392-5109.



# Coming Up High Holy Days Schedule

*Transliteration will be available*

**ROSH HASHANA**

Erev Rosh Hashana, Sept. 17, 6:30PM

Day 1: Sept. 18, Tuesday, 8:30-1:00

Day 2: Sept. 19, Wednesday, 8:30-1:00

(Children's Service, both days, 10:30)

## YOM KIPPUR

Kol Nidre, Sept. 26, Wednesday, 6:30PM

Yom Kippur, Sept. 27, Thursday, 8:30

*Services will end at sundown, followed by our*

*traditional break fast. Everyone is welcome!*

Sukkot and Shabbat Hol Hamoed services will be held in

the sukkah of Joe and Sydel Roth. Call them at 781-4078

for directions. Please don't call on Shabbat.

**SUKKOT** (and lunch): Oct. 2, Tuesday, 9:30

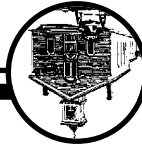
**SHABBAT HOL HAMOED** (and kiddush) Oct. 6,

Saturday, 9:30

*In the Synagogue:*

**SIMCHAT TORAH**

Oct. 9, Tuesday, 7:00PM



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

JOIN US FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS