

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge

Cheshvan-Kislev-Tevet 5762 Vol. III, Number 2 November/December 2001

The Seed, The Bud, The Stalk, The Blossom...

by Steve Ostrow

Having grown up in Brooklyn during the '50's, I thought of vegetables as the gray peas and textureless canned carrot chunks my parents placed before my brother and me at the dinner table. Our parents—children of green horns, products of the '30's—trusted in the country that had given them so much. They never questioned the purity or nutritional value of "processed" foods. From their perspective, canned was good and fortified was even better. As modern people, they felt that farming, although necessary, was dirty, and food needed to be sanitized and treated.

My grandmother, having come from a small town near Kiev, however, knew better. My brother and I loved to visit her home in Sheepshead Bay, where she would slip us raw string beans and fresh, crunchy cabbage leaves, accompanied by the injunction: "Yeat, tottala". Still, while she was loved and respected by my parents, her views on veggies were regarded as "old fashioned." Today, our attitude about

vegetables has come full circle, right back to my grandmother.

Fittingly, this attitude is reflected in the curriculum of the Hebrew School at SMB. SMB was originally called The Synagogue at The Farm, in deference to its rural roots, its and connection to Baron de Hirsch, who funded agrarian based communities for European Jewish settlers during the late Nineteenth century.

As part of the curriculum, our Hebrew School committee arranged several Family Mitzvah Projects, the first of which was on Sunday, October 7. On that day, a dozen or so students and family members were welcomed by Willie Denner and Claudia Kenney to their farm, Little Seed Garden, in Stuyvesant, NY, to "glean" their crop and deliver vegetables to a local food pantry. Little Seed is a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) growing organically nurtured vegetables.

What did I expect to find at Little Seed? Maybe some left and picked-over beans and a few potatoes in the dirt. Instead, I found the five or so acres that Claudia and Willie have farmed since the mid-nineties to be a

living field of seasonal abundance. Melon patches past their prime, overgrown and about to be plowed under, lay alongside vibrant plantings of collards, cabbage, broccoli and huge fans of kale.

The gleaning was well underway when we arrived. Five bushels of carrots had already been picked by a contented crew, their faces bright with sun, wind and smiles. I greeted those I knew, met those I didn't, and was handed a bucket to fill as we moved to a row of succulent green string beans. My grandmother, to be sure, would have approved.

The first frost was imminent, and most of these beans would not survive it. Grandparents, parents and children hunkered down and filled the long row, picking, talking, laughing. The sun warmed our faces and backs but the gentle wind had an undertone of chill.

A few of us were experienced farmers, both locally, and on kib-

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.



butzim. Some of us tend small gardens here in Columbia County, but at least one of us had almost no experience. It was a revelation: from the easy, friendly camaraderie of working together outdoors, to the utterly unexpected sensual and spiritual delight of the fields. Beans were snapped eagerly off their bushes and buckets overflowed with the summer's gifts. Children worked and ate happily as they skipped around the plantings, skillfully landing in the furrows. Friends caught up with one another and the day flew as the harvest was transferred from buckets to crates and boxes.

The afternoon's work yielded several hundred pounds of carrots, beans and potatoes, lightly dusted

Grandparents, parents and children hunkered down...

and scented by the silken soil. We brought our gleanings to a food pantry in Hudson, (less approximately one pound each sampled by every gleaner to ensure quality and verify freshness). I wish my parents and their generation could have been there with us to exult in the land as we did that day. Our grandparents knew the glory of the earth, and I'm confident our children will as well.

Other Family Mitzvah Projects are planned, and will be announced through the weekly update.

Ess gesunderleit!

Commentary

Antiochus and Haman: Alive and Well

by Fred Rheingold

Most often, when the Torah discusses the holidays it lists them as a cycle—a series of steppingstones spanning the year. You cannot cross the stream if you remove even one of the stones. Although we are inclined to think of each holiday as a unique and meaningful event, they become richer and even more meaningful when we take a few steps back and think about them from this broader perspective.

Chanukah, for example, celebrates a victory of the Jewish people over the forces of assimilation. The Macabees preserved Judaism, despite overwhelming pressure by the Greeks to abandon it in favor of their dominant world view. Their goal was a kind of "reform" that would repackage Judaism as another variety of Hellenistic culture, and the victory of the Macabees was nothing less than a triumph for the spiritual survival of Judaism. We triumphed over forces that were aimed at eradicating our customs and beliefs and, ultimately, our way of life.

Chanukah takes on a richer texture, however, when we juxtapose it with Purim. Both holidays celebrate Jewish survival, but while Chanukah focuses on our spiritual survival, Purim celebrates our physical survival. While Antiochus and his forces (many of whom were Jewish assimilationists) wanted to eradicate Judaism, Haman

was intent on exterminating Jews.

The drama of those holidays, as well as the difference between them, was played out again during our lifetime. Hitler, the modern personification of Haman, was bent on wiping out the Jews. The Soviet Union, however, was perfectly willing to accept Jews, so long as long as they allowed their Judaism to be absorbed by Socialism. Socialism, in other words, was the Soviet's equivalent of Hellenism.

Jews are commanded to remember the Creation, the Exodus from Egypt, the Revelation at Sinai, and Shabbat as part of our daily liturgy. When we fulfill this commandment, we can actually say that each day contains all the holidays. Each day offers an opportunity to think about the fact that we are threatened both by those who want us to merge into a larger melting pot, and by those who simply don't want us to exist; by those who plot our spiritual demise, and by those who plot our physical demise.

Recently, we have had more reason than ever to think about these issues. World leaders have professed to respect Jews at the very same time that they have equated Zionism with racism. In the days following September 11, the link between Chanukah and Purim has been clearer than ever. At the moment, it appears that Haman is masquerading as Antiochus.



Member's News

Our High Holiday services were genuinely inspiring in every possible way, not the least of which was the generosity of our membership and their appreciation for the efforts of their fellow congregants. We thank all who attended. We thank all who participated. We thank all who organized. And we thank all who found a way to contribute, either financially, or with their time, effort, knowledge and creativity. We are also delighted to welcome seventeen new members into our congregation since the New Year. If we have left your name off a specific list of thank-you's, trust that it was an over-sight we will make up for in our next issue.

Mazel Tov-

Lucile and Sheldon Lichtblau on the engagement of their son.

Jim Farrell on the dramatic reading of his play by Stageworks.

Lucile Lichtblau on the performance of her play by the Stageworks benefit.

Thank You-

Sheila Silver for your engaging participation in our Conversation Pieces series.

Joe and Sydelle Roth for hosting SMB's Succot celebrations.

Mark Feder for masterminding our wonderful break fast.

Contributions-

Erica Berman, Andrew Pellettieri and Fern Apfel, Jeffrey and Joan Bloomberg, Dorothy Burg, Alice and Burt Swersey, Dr. Bernard and

Florence Mehl, Doreen and Norman Levy, Sharon and Bennett Cohen, Phillip and Marjorie Lewis, Irene and Jack Frankel, Carl and Joan Rabb, Howard S. Brezner, Samuel and Sue Press, Marcie Shemaria and Richard L. Gardner, Charles and Joyce Sarner, Alexander M. and Amy White, Robert P. and Jacqueline F. Berg, Arnold and Gloria Kaufman, Brett I. Parker, Noah Brosh and Aaron Spungin, Steve Beber and Sandy Parker, Fannie Hiller, Nancy Rothman and Steven Ostrow in honor of David Rothman, Sheldon and Lucile Lichtblau, Carl and Shirley Bakal, Albert F. Gordon, Paulette and Herbert Soloway, Gerald D. and Lois L. Staffin, Harriet Yelin in memory of Bert Yelin, and Anna and Louis Yelin, Arthur and Elaine Greenberg, Eleanor M. Lees, Anonymous in

memory of Abe and Rebecca Chavin, Adolph J. and Helene Berger, Philip and Anita Pearlman in gratitude for the safety of their son-in-law Robert Meyers, Alvin D. Knoll and Donna Miller, Carol Weir, and Fannie Hiller in hone of Sydelle and Joe Roth's 45th wedding anniversary.

Welcome to New Members

Nancy Andell, Carl and Shirley Bakal, Steve Beber and Sandy Parker, Bertram H. Freed, Max and Elisabeth Gitter, Richard J. Katz and Debra Kalmuss, Dr. Bernard and Florence Mehl, Roberta and Morton Meyerson, Branda Miller, Sylvain and Barbara Nagler, Stephen M. Poppel, Laura Portin, Timothy and Sue Ellen Price, Charles and Joyce Sarner, Mel and Audrey Schoenfeld, Sandra Segan, Gerald D. and Lois L. Staffin.

Hebrew School

Our Hebrew School is off to an exciting start, with activities like the Gleaning and more Family Mitzvah Projects in the works. Our Junior Congregation has been progressing beautifully as well. Last week, all of our children gathered to make Chanukiot with Sarah Leibovitz's mom, Mary, a ceramic artist. Mary took the Chanukiot home to fire in her kiln. They will be ready in time for the Religious School's Chanukah party.



From Jerusalem



Our member, Diane Liebovitz, is spending the year studying in Israel. She will stay in touch with her friends at SMB with Letter from Jerusalem.

I've been here for just two weeks and Jerusalem already feels like home. Americans often complain about Israeli chutzpah. I'm finding, however, that while Israelis aren't always very polite and are quick to butt into each other's business (I jaywalked across a main street and a man yelled at me for not being more careful), there's another side to their brusqueness. They're quick to offer help, even before you ask for it. If you look lost, someone will invariably ask if you need directions. Everyone has given me names to contact, and when I follow up on those contacts I get dinner invitations as well as offers to come and pick me. They assume that I don't have a car and won't think of asking me to take public transportation. The warmth comes out in many ways—always with a very embracing, Jewish family feeling.

The terrorist bombings and the daily shootings are referred to as the "matzav" (the situation). They impact daily life in many ways, although no one talks much about it. You hear the helicopters whirring overhead in the evening and you know they're getting ready for an "action," either in Bethlehem or Beit Jalla. Jerusalem is small and the distances between the cities so short that you can get almost anywhere in 15 or 20 minutes. Going from the center of Jerusalem to Bethlehem is like going from the Upper West side to Greenwich Village, and, depending on traffic, it doesn't take much longer. You often hear the rifle shoots and the mortars when it starts to get dark, yet people go about their business. They have parties and outings, and everyone has a cell phone so that makes it easy to keep in contact no matter where you are. Families take advantage of "family package deals" that offer extension cell phones for kids so they can always find their parents.

Family life here seems different

than in the U. S. First of all, there seem to be children, schools and playgrounds everywhere. Jerusalem must be the most fertile place in the world! What stands out for me is the amount of fatherly participation in childcare. Fathers take kids to daycare in the mornings and out for walks on Shabbat afternoon, without Mama. You see them shopping in the supermarket, pushing the baby carriage, picking up kids in the afternoon, carrying little infants in baby carriers and doing all the things we used to think of as the woman's job. It's an aspect of Israeli life we don't often hear about and it's very nice to see.

The rains have started, it's a little early but a very good thing, since the country has been in drought condition for the last 3-4 years. Perhaps the rain is a good omen for things. Meanwhile, don't forget to include the "mashive ha roach ou moride ha geshem" (make the wind blow and the rain fall) in your prayers on Saturday. We'll need it until Passover.

Shalom—Diane

Microcinema

On Saturday, December 22 at 8:00PM join us for Solomon and Gaenor. A 2000 Oscar nominee for Best Foreign Language Film that features dialogue in English, Welsh, and Yiddish. Set in a Welsh mining town in 1911, it tells the tragic tale of a forbidden romance between a Welsh girl and an Orthodox Jewish boy. Stars Ioan Gruffudd, TV's charismatic Horatio Hornblower.

On Saturday, February 2 at 8:00PM, don't miss The Wannsee Conference, a riveting recreation of the secret meeting in Wannsee, Germany in 1942 during which The Final Solution was first proposed and quickly accepted. Adolph Eichmann took the notes for the 87-minute meeting, which are the basis for this 87-minute film that recreates the whole affair in real time. "Unlike any other Holocaust film I've ever seen... Mesmerizing... Provocative"-Vincent Canby, The New York Times.



Reflections on Where We've Been and Where We're Going

by Lydia Kukoff

In December, The Synagogue at Malden Bridge will be two years old. We have grown from ten member families to almost 60. But our growth is not only numerical; it is reflected in our range of programming. Starting two years ago only with Shabbat services (including our engaging discussion of the weekly Torah portion in English and our delicious kid-dush), we can now proudly list:

- An expanded religious school, including classes for children aged 5 through bar/bat mitzvah, as well as junior congregation, programming for families, and an ethics discussion group for our post – bar/bat mitzvah children.

- Year-round Microcinema, showcasing remarkable films of Jewish interest.

- Conversation Pieces programs, which enable outstanding creative individuals to share their work with our community.

- Classes for adults, such as User-Friendly Talmud, The One-Day Hebrew Marathon, and Understanding the Shabbat Morning Service.

- The Ma'yan Seder.

- Gleanings, a Sukkot tzedakah project consisting of harvesting the produce from a local farm and bringing it to a community food pantry (see p. 1).

- The first Yom ha-Shoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) program in this area.

- The first Jewish cemetery in northern Columbia County (see p. 5).

- The first public Jewish presence in many of our area's interfaith activities.

- Celebrating the arrival of our first Sefer Torah.

- Celebrating all the holidays of our Jewish year with creativity and energy (see p. 8).

This is a remarkable list for any fledgling Congregation, especially given the fact that all these accomplishments are member-generated and member-led. We are rightfully proud of the talent and energy of our community and of the reflective way that the Board guides the growth of our young community. As we begin our third year, we want to continue to provide ourselves with opportunities that expand our knowledge and experience of Judaism.

Shabbat is our most frequently occurring holiday. It is the focal point of the Jewish week and a focal point of our congregation. Our Shabbat services are very well attended and we have lively and enlightening participation in our Torah discussion, which has become the centerpiece of our service. Now we want to turn our attention to ways in which we can enhance the rest of the Shabbat service.

During the course of this year, we will seek to evolve a service that will be accessible, meaningful, engaging, aesthetic, spirited—that will speak to the wide range of backgrounds represented in our community. We cherish our diversity.

Our year of exploration will have several components:

- A new siddur – Our ritual committee will explore several different siddurim that may be appropriate for

our congregation. The various sid-durim that will be available for perusal on Shabbat and on loan so that members can share their opinions with committee members.

- Weekly learning sessions about the Shabbat morning service – Each Shabbat, we will begin at 9:30 AM (sharp!) with a 10 minute exploration of one element of the service.

- Shabbatonim (extended Shabbat experiences) with visiting resource people – Throughout the year, we will celebrate Shabbat with different individuals who have expertise in leading innovative services so that we can experience new approaches. During the course of These Shabbatot, we will have opportunities for sharing and evaluation.

The ritual committee (Bernie Kukoff, chair, George Carey, Joe Roth, Mark Dickerman, Fred Rheingold) will be distilling all the information gathered and giving periodic reports to the Board, which will be shared with the congregation. By late Spring, we hope to arrive at a consensus about our services.

The factor that will contribute most to the success of this year of exploration will be the thoughts, insights and presence of everyone. We have a unique opportunity to learn and grow together. Please come and lend your voice in song, in learning and in assessment.

(See schedule and details of Shabbaton on back cover.)



Point of View

The Exclusive Right To Hate

By Elizabeth Wilen-Berg

"Be careful. As a Jew, you'll be blamed and betrayed when you least expect it."

This was a recurrent warning from my mother during my childhood. She gave me many other words of caution and advice, but this one stood out. I understood that her distrust of others came from what she had experienced during the Holocaust. My mother wanted to be sure her children knew not only how to survive, but how to be prepared should another holocaust befall the Jewish people. I have been preparing for the next holocaust all my life, and although nothing could have really prepared me for the events of Sept. 11th, I was not surprised that, again, there were those who would choose to blame the Jews for this catastrophe.

Since the terrifying events of Sept. 11th and the subsequent terrors in the days and weeks that followed, our thoughts and attitudes about ourselves, about others, and about "foreigners" has altered dramatically. This has been particularly evident to me in the course of my counseling work near Ground Zero with people who have suffered devastating losses, and, to a lesser extent, in my psychotherapy work in the Berkshires. The significant role that religion has played in these catastrophic events has caused much confusion and concern about what to expect in the months and years ahead, and generated great speculation about the future of the world. Will the terrors of the 21st century far outstrip those we suffered in the 20th century?

As a psychologist, I have labored to understand the human condition. As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, and a teacher of Holocaust studies, I have struggled to understand why people commit atrocities. How are bin Laden and his followers different from Hitler and the Nazis?

How are they the same? Are the new "Islamist" extremists merely born-again Nazis who spout hatred towards "non-believers" and then blame the Jews for any atrocities or social ills? The Nazis, like the Taliban, first shunned and eventually persecuted and killed anyone who didn't join and support them. The Nazis justified their heinous treatment of Jews with a propaganda campaign that blamed them for every social problem and societal ill that befell the German Reich.

Blaming others can provide easy answers during harsh times; Jews recognize this phenomenon as scapegoating. When living conditions decline and the causes seem unclear, people are inclined to seek simple, unambiguous answers. Strictly orthodox and fundamentalist interpreta-

twisted in profound and unexpected ways to serve the perverse ambitions of ruthless leaders. Those leaders want us to believe that their followers are indistinguishable from the general population of "Muslims," just as the Nazis wanted us to believe that they were indistinguishable from the German people. We know, however, that Germans died at Dachau and elsewhere-fighting the Nazi ideology. And we know that all Muslims are not radical Islamists. We must distinguish between the two lest we begin to lump people into two camps—the "good ones" and the "evil ones"—in much the same way that they do.

Leaders can be said to reflect the values of a people, but they can also shape and change those values. It has taken nearly two thousand years of history and more than fifty years post Holocaust for leaders of the Catholic church to admit their role in centuries of religious persecution against Jews. Taking responsibility for one's actions

"I have been preparing for, the next Holocaust all my life."

tions of religion and the arbitrariness of autocratic state systems offer an alternative to ambiguity. Such fundamentalists and states promote "their way" as the "only way" and discredit outsiders as infidels or outcasts, who become easy targets for blame. If those outside the group persist in obstinately refusing to "see the light" by becoming part of the insider group, then they must be inherently flawed, diminished, and deserving of scorn and punishment.

Is religion responsible for promoting violent actions against innocent people, or is it the perversion of religion by self-serving leaders that should be held accountable for the intense hatred, revulsion and fear of other belief systems? Certainly we've learned from the past that religion can be

and outcomes is a significant step towards reconciliation. It is a recognition of our interconnectedness and our desire for inclusivity.

What messages do we want to give our children? What messages should Muslims give to their children? Will Muslims someday regret not standing up to bin Laden's radical, regressive and oppressive messages of hate in the same way that many Germans today regret having allowed Hitler and the Nazi ideology to usurp their country and their basic beliefs? Will Muslims regret not stopping bin Laden for stealing their religion to promote his rise to power in the same way that Germany, the European nations, and the United States regret not having stopped Hitler before he



wreaked unspeakable havoc and human destruction?

We must not be afraid to challenge and fight against false messages and twisted thinking. We know that poverty, deprivation and hunger are the prime catalysts that allow radical extremist thinking to breed successfully and capture the minds and thoughts of nations. They are also the prime psychological tools of tyrants who use them for their own despotic purposes. Hitler knew it and bin Laden knows it.

In order to create human harmony we must first recognize the pervasive inter-

...poverty, deprivation and hunger are prime catalysts...

connectedness of all things. We must unequivocally embrace the concept of interdependence in nature and in the universe, and accept responsibility not only for ourselves, but for others as well. Our right hand is separate from our left hand, and it is possible for one hand to have a distinctly different appearance and function from the other hand. But it is not possible for one hand to be the enemy of the other without destroying the whole person.

We need to feel special and unique and exclusive, and at the very same time we need to feel bonded and linked in a group, a community, a nation, the world, the universe. We extol and revel in our individuality, at the very same time that we yearn for community. As we struggle to find the balance between exclusivity and inclusivity, religion can help us or it can destroy the balance altogether

When we foist our personal struggles onto our institutions and externalize what should be internalized, the result is always chaos, misery and a serious threat to our nationhood and collective identity. Perhaps the only battles we should fight are those within ourselves.

Community

The Plots Thicken

By Alan Gelb

Five of us were sitting around Tom Hope's new Main Street pub in Chatham on a recent chilly October evening. Unlike other patrons who were arguing over who was going to win the Series or what should be done to Bin Laden, we were talking cemetery. Between sips of Brooklyn Lager and Sierra Nevada pale ale, the five of us from SMB were trying to get a handle on this project of ours, which was to create the first-ever Jewish cemetery in northern Columbia County.

Part of living where we do is that there isn't a whole lot of infrastructure in place for Jewish life. To live in Columbia County as a Jew is to understand, first-hand, what it means to be in the minority. We are proud to say that SMB has done a lot in a relatively short period of time to remedy that situation. Now, here in northern Columbia County, we have our shul, we have our Torah, we have our community that meets weekly for Shabbat and Torah, we have our holiday celebrations, we have cultural programming of Jewish interest and...drumroll, please...we are about to have a Jewish cemetery.

For those of us on the Cemetery Committee—a tiny group in dire need of reinforcement—the creation of hallowed ground has shaped up as something of an adventure or at least a steep learning curve. After recognizing the need for a Jewish cemetery, we had to find a place to create one. We looked at land (expensive to buy, develop and maintain) and then we

got a sweetheart offer from the Chatham Rural Cemetery. The Chatham Rural Cemetery is an old, beautiful, and peaceful environment high up on a hill overlooking Chatham Village. It is a nonsectarian municipal cemetery that owns hundreds of acres, and, when they learned of our interest in creating our own cemetery, they very graciously offered us five of their acres.

There is no outright purchase; we buy by the plot, just as everyone else does. And having researched the stipulations for creating a Jewish cemetery, we now know that there are only three: demarcation between the Jewish section and the rest of the cemetery (this could be a natural hedge); exclusive Jewish use; and agreement that the remains never be moved. The Chatham Rural Cemetery agreed to meet three stipulations.

As we passed the hour at Peint O'Grew (that's Welsh for something having to do with alcohol), we divvied up the project into five main areas of work: design; legal; Jewish law; surveying and land preparation; and marketing. There is much to do, but all of it is do-able, particularly if we have more people helping. If you have the interest and just a bit of time, please join the Committee by calling Alan Gelb at 392-5109 or e-mailing at levglbcomm@taconic.net. The good news is that the Committee has resolved to have all future meetings at the pub. As they say in Welsh, *L'Chaim*.



Coming Up

Shabbaton and More...

We are happy to announce our first Shabbaton. Our guest will be Or Rose, a doctoral candidate in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University. He has a B.A. from Yeshiva University, studied at the Hebrew University, and taught at the Pardes Institute. Or has extensive experience leading innovative High Holy Day and Shabbat services in different settings and is especially interested in combining reflective elements with spirited singing.

The schedule for the Shabbaton will be:

•Friday, November 16, 6-7 PM.
Kabbalat Shabbat (evening services)

•Saturday, November 17, 9:30 AM.
Shabbat morning service.

•9:30 AM–10 minute teaching “The Tallit.”

•9:40-12:00—services, with Torah discussion.

•12-1:30—Kiddush, followed by a moderated discussion, led by Or Rose, which will elicit thoughts and opinions from congregants.

Also-

•December 2, 3 PM. We will gather with members of the Wesley United Methodist Church to listen to the NPR Bill Moyers tape in which he reflects on 9/11 and its aftermath. Discussion will follow.

•December 14, 7PM. An SMB adult Chanukah party which will be held in the home of a member. Location to be announced. A great way to get to know fellow congregants.



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