

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge

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...A Light of Nations—Opening Eyes Deprived of Light (Isaiah 42: 6-7)

by **George Carey**

As we enter the tumultuous twenty first century, we confront intractable problems at all scales of human society, not the least of which is our nation's overloaded public education system. Childhood literacy suffers in particular. Mimi Levin Lieber, one of our members, founded Literacy, Inc. (LINC) in 1997, and now serves as its Chairperson.

“Two firm beliefs provide the foundation for LINC,” says Lieber. “That every child can read on time with enough one-on-one support—and that every community has the significant strengths and resources to provide this support.”

The first efforts were within

New York City, where LINC coordinators have increased literacy opportunities for thousands of children and families. Their focus is on early childhood literacy, through the development of successful formulas for engaging the community with programs and events to increase out-of-classroom reading time for young readers. Older student and adult volunteers form partnerships with younger children; reading areas for children and their families are created in local businesses, like laundromats; Saturday Literacy Fairs are sponsored by community members and businesses.

In Washington Heights McDonald's and the YM-YWHA collaborate in a weekly family reading night attended by 25 families and their children. Here, recent guest readers ranged the gamut from Mathilda Cuomo, to Jorge

Isquiedo (the Superintendent of School District 6), to Ronald McDonald!

Because the programs are developed from small interlocking networks of interested local people, they more easily become an integral part of neighborhood life. When the wider community is involved, parents feel as if they're not alone in raising their children, and children come to know that everyone really cares about them.

LINC aims to create a model for other communities which will fit their own unique neighborhood needs, leading to sustainable literacy activities. Sustainability is fostered by recruiting reading partner volunteers in neighborhoods around elementary schools

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.



rather than from outside the community.

LINC has established a childhood literacy effort close to home in Hudson, New York, with a coordinator hired from the local community and trained by the LINC staff. SMB members Nathaniel Levine Gelb and Ginger Feldman, have organized a group of boys from Chatham High School, who will be working with the program this summer.

It is expected that this effort will yield rewards to the children of Hudson and Chatham,

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as well as foster the development of a workable model that may be adapted to the needs of any community to help "open eyes deprived of light."

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Commentary

Tikkun Olam

by Julia Delain

Martin Buber explained that, "We carry the burden of an unredeemed world. We cannot concede that redemption is an accomplished fact for we know that it is not so." Although we live in a world badly in need of repair, doing a mitzvah rarely feels burdensome. Hillel declared, "Don't separate yourself from the community." The simplest action done for another can become a treasured memory shared. When one works on behalf of others, doing a task that might be a chore at home becomes a celebration of community.

We are commanded by the Mishnah (Peah,1:1): "*These are the precepts that have no prescribed measure: the corner of the field (which must be left for the poor), the first fruit offering, the pilgrimage, acts of kindness, and Torah Study.*" This spirit of Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) is embodied in many actions and programs of our members.

In this spirit, at Succot we sponsor "Gleaning the Harvest," and harvest the corners of the field for the poor. We do this literally—taking the children into the harvest fields—and symbolically, year round, collecting grocery contributions for food pantries.

As acts of loving kindness, members and friends make nursing home visits, visit the sick, contribute old cell phones for adaptation to the needs of those who may require emergency services—all on a basis of need, and frequently in collaboration with other organizations on an interfaith basis.

In terms of outreach on a broader scale, as a congregation we have pro-

vided for medical supplies to facilities in Israel such as the Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem, which treats all who come regardless of ethnicity or religion: a haven of peace in a time of war.

From Gleaning the Harvest for Food Pantries, Literacy Volunteers, Theater Projects, interfaith programs, visiting nursing home, visiting the sick, donating cell phones for emergency service, contributing supplies to hospitals in Israel, and preserving a dialogue about peace in a time of war, our members are committed to Tikkun Olam.

As a community, the more we reach out to one another and engage with the world around us, the stronger we become. All of our Social Action Activities happen because people get involved! Let's build on what we've got by continuing to join together in these actions. Also, we could really use involvement in the following areas: transportation to services for congregants who don't drive, planning a Mitzvah Day, and all of our ongoing activities as mentioned above. Community action is a great way for families to share time together and help build a stronger society. Please share your special and unique talents and support SMB by getting involved! We could really use your help! And we welcome any further suggestions to help Tikkun Olam.

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Member's News

Or Rose visited our congregation for a Shabbaton on Shabbat and Sunday, May 16-18. The culminating activity was a meeting devoted to a developmental overview of the philosophies which played a key role in defining the mission of contemporary Israel. Our thanks to Karen Levine and Alan Gelb for hosting this event for the benefit of the congregation. The setting and the hospitality set the tone for what proved to be an exceptionally rich and thought-provoking session.

Editor's note: previous commitments have kept me away from my editorial duties on this issue. George Carey has graciously (and courageously) stepped up to the plate. Thank you George. I think we'll keep you!--Karen Levine

Mazel Tov-

- Alice & Burt Swersey on the birth of their three grandsons—may the total continue to rise!
- Bobby Katz-Steinbach and parents, Pam Katz and Richard Steinbach on Bobby's Bar Mitzvah.
- Janno Lieber, who was recently named Senior Vice President of Silverstein Properties, and who will be Director of Development for the new World Trade Center site.

Thank You-

- Barbara and Myron Cohen for hosting Shabbat services and Kiddush in their lovely home.
- Larry and Janie Machiz for

hosting the Shavout Tikkun, and to our teachers-Yehuda Hanani, Chuck Simon, Judith Rosenbaum, and Or Rose.

In Honor of Bernie Kukoff's 70th

- Bobbie and Alex DeJoia
- Bella Meyer & Martin Kace
- Alan Gelb & Karen Levine
- Charles & Mimi Lieber
- Larry & Janie Machiz
- Barbara Corday
- Arthur & Lois Ginsberg
- Nancy Berman & Alan Bloch
- James Vincent & Lucille Amadie
- Steve Ostrow & Nancy Rothman
- Tony & Sue Anne Converse
- George & Janet Carey

- Cavin Leeman & Diane L. Zimmerman
- Burt & Alice Swersey
- Arnold & Caren Toren
- Robert & Sharon Alper
- Harry & Susan Newton
- Shirley Kukoff
- Nathan M. Silverstein
- Nahum & Alice L. Lainer

In Loving Memory:

- Elaine M. Greenberg in Loving Memory of her mother, Dorothy Stone.
- Gerald & Lois Staffin, in Loving Memory of Harry Labovitz; Peggy Labovitz;; Dr. Elizabeth Labovitz and Morris Staffin,
- Harriet Yellin in Loving Memory of Bert Yellin

Our Playwrights

On Sunday, May 4, 50 members and friends of The Synagogue at Malden Bridge spent a delightful afternoon at the theater. Stageworks, a Hudson-based theater company that performs at North Pointe in Kinderhook, opened its season with Play by Play, a compilation of 11 10-minute plays by 11 playwrights. This has become a traditional venue for the company during the past 7 years. What was different this year was that 9 of the plays were culled from the previous years' as outstanding former productions. What was special was that 3 of the 9 playwrights are members of our synagogue: Jim Farrell, Alan Gelb and Lucile Lichtblau. The opportunity to enjoy the production and toast these gifted members of our talented congregation was irresistible. At the reception which followed, catered by Zvi Cohen and hosted by Janet Carey and Annette Schickman, we were joined by the actors and director for a very lively and frelich afternoon. We look forward to spending many more happy and rewarding hours together.



Poems by Benjamin Kukoff: Modern Midrash

JACOB AND LEAH

*(When morning came there was Leah! So he said to Laban,
"what is this you have done to me?" Genesis: 29)*

So—what's going on?
Are we to believe Jacob doesn't know this was
Leah writhing under him this night, not Rachel?

Maybe, when she first slips into his tent—
maybe it's a little dark--
and she's got on all those robes and veils—
but once between the sheets— come on!
Rachel's the beauty he desires, shapely, whose lips
he's already tasted. This is Leah, passionate perhaps,
but the homely one, flat-chested, and with weak eyes.
Surely he knows.

But Jacob is now on the patriarch path,
and the good patriarch doesn't dare reject the needy,
unloved woman. The good patriarch will also work, uncomplaining,
another seven years for his beloved Rachel, enduring
the trickery and treachery of his father-in-law.

We may wonder—
this is the bible, the word of God
why all this subterfuge?
Because this is God's truth—
-that we are his creatures and though
created in His image, very often,
depending on the circumstances,
we simply can't be trusted





ISAAC

What could Abraham have said to him on their way down from Mt Moriah?
That God was testing him—would never let him go through with it.
And didn't the ram in the thicket prove that?

But is Isaac even listening?
That morning, Abraham, waking him caressing his face—
that afternoon, binding him atop sacrificial logs, holding a knife to his throat.

Passive to begin with (and who wouldn't be with those parents),
he doesn't know how to protest, to get angry, to say
God who? Which God? And what kind of God would do this?
Doesn't know to ask what kind of father would listen to such a God?

And that night do they sit around the table, eat as a family,
Abraham, that day, adding to his reputation as God's man,
with Sarah, his consort, self-absorbed as always, basking?
They can't possibly see Isaac, dutifully eating his lentils feeding
his overwhelming despair.

MOSES

(...he went out to his kinfolk and witnessed their toil.—Exodus: 2)

As of late a change has come over him
He still moves with that quiet, confident grace, but now seeks
the shadows, avoids conversation.
Now dresses modestly, eschewing
the silks, jeweled amulets and gold bracelets of his station,
preferring a worker's cotton barely a cut above
the rough hemp of the Hebrew slave

In the Pharaoh's court he can no longer stomach
the rich food, the gossip, refuses to go whoring
in the flesh pots with his fellow princes, or to offer
sacrifices with them at the temple of Osiris.
And every day while they lunch on quail stewed with dates,
drink cool wine in their shaded pavilions,

he strides, unaffected by the searing sun,
among the slaves: the brick-cutters, mortar-mixers, hod-carriers,
climbing Pharaoh's structures with them in silence, seeking... what?
What does he want?
their eyes seem to ask

One day...
He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen...he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Not long after that, God got in touch.



Community

Did you know...

By Alan Gelb

Ah, Wales. What can you say about a little nation that has given the world Dylan Thomas, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Welsh rarebit? But there's more: Wales might actually be the site of the origin of philo-Semitism, the opposite of anti-Semitism.

This matter was brought to my attention one evening as I sat in Peint O' Gwrw, Chatham's invaluable Welsh pub. The proprietor, Tom Hope, came rushing over to me with a copy of NINNAU, the North American Welsh Newspaper, hot off the presses. He directed my attention to a book review of *The Chosen People: Wales and the Jews*, edited by Graham Davies and published by Seren Books in 2002. The thesis of this book is that Wales' affinity for the Jews began with the works of Welsh Biblical scholars (or pseudo-scholars) in the 17th and 18th centuries who speculated that

the Welsh language was, in fact, derived from Hebrew. Theophilus Evans in *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* (1716) opined that the Welsh were descended from the Hebrews through Gomer, grandson of Noah, noting that the name Gomer was similar to Gymro, a mutation of the Welsh word for Welshman.

Building on these theories, and jumping ahead two and a half centuries, Welsh nationalists took inspiration from the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. They saw parallels between the Jewish and Welsh conditions and admired how Zionists revived Hebrew as a spoken language, hoping to do the same with Welsh. Harri Webb, the "People's Poet" from Swansea, even wrote a poem called "Israel," which included the verse: "The mountains are red with their blood/the deserts are green with their seed./Listen, Wales."

Perhaps the most crucial expression of the Welsh-Jewish connection,

according to *The Chosen People*, was the support of Zionism by David Lloyd George, the Welsh-born Prime Minister of Britain from 1916 to 1922. While Lloyd George did not believe the mythology of the Hebrew origins of Welsh, he endorsed his people's heritage of sympathy for the Jews. During World War I, he directed General Allenby to liberate Palestine from the Turks and the 53rd Welsh Division played a leading role in the capture of Jerusalem in 1917. The Welsh saw their campaign as a religious mission and various memoirs of the event read like the works of Zionists. Lloyd George was also a close friend of Chaim Weizmann.

Food for thought. Or, as it were, drink for thought. If you find yourself on Chatham's Main Street, stop in at Tom Hope's pub, order a Speckled Hen (an adult version of a Bronx egg cream) and tell him that a Jew sent you.

Microcinema

Living Room Films

The Synagogue finds itself overinventoried in excellent films that are better seen in a more intimate setting than we can offer at the church. So we've got something new: an ongoing series of small gatherings in people's homes for an evening of cinema. Seating will be limited to no more than

twelve on a first come, first serve, r.s.v.p. basis. Our maiden voyage will be hosted by George and Janet Carey on a date to be announced, with a film to be announced. Sounds great doesn't it? Stay tuned.



Coming Up

Strange Fruit at TSL

SMB Goes to TSL for Strange Fruit

Sunday June 29 7:00 PM

The Synagogue revisits Time and Space, Hudson's premiere performance space, for a special screening of the documentary **Strange Fruit**. This one-hour film tells the story of the haunting anti-lynching ballad, recorded by Billie Holiday and written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish high school teacher who went on to adopt the sons of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Interviewed in the film are Pete Seeger,

Abbey Lincoln, Cassandra Wilson, and the Rosenberg sons, with archival footage of Lady Day. Filmmaker Joel Katz will be present for questions and answers.

"An incredible story, told with integrity. A movie to savor"-San Francisco Examiner

Reception to follow. Admission \$7.50 for TSL members; \$10 for non-members. TSL is located at 434 Columbia Street in Hudson.

SAVE THE DATES

Sunday July 27 7:00PM Film (to be announced)

SHABBATON with Or Rose

Friday evening July 18

Saturday morning services July 19

Sunday morning workshop July 20



The Synagogue at Malden Bridge
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