

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge

Tevet Shvat 5765 Vol. VI, Number 2 January/February 2005

Remembrance

by George Carey

When I was in my pre-teens, I had an unforgettable experience of a spiritual nature which I have always been reluctant to relate—lest I be regarded as a nut, or a charlatan. In fact, at the present juncture in our national history, when competing Ideologies hold dangerous sway, it might be the better course to exercise reticence than to tell my story. Certainly, as a child I was aware that describing any personal spiritual experience would likely be trivialized by well-meaning adults as a childish fantasy, or simply viewed as bizarre. Worse yet—the very act of trying to explain my entry into a state of sensitized awareness, which was inner, emotional and non-verbal, might destroy the experience. But here goes...

In the Spring of 1938 or 1939 (a long time ago), I set out, allowance in hand, to go to the old John Wanamaker Store, which then stood on the edge of Greenwich Village. I recall that it was a bright, cool morn-

ing with the sycamore trees just coming into leaf.

Suddenly everything was transformed. The sunlight seemed to gain in intensity and to come from everywhere, including from within me. The colors and shapes in the scene also intensified, and blurred together—seeming to join and flow into each other—with boundaries and edges between separate objects, myself included, interpenetrating.

Odors in the air—of coffee, of baked goods—became indescribably lovely. The discords of the street suddenly became harmonious. I experienced a sense of deep well being, of profound peace and wonder at once solitary and personal, yet also organically connected to the rhythms of the world around me. It must only have lasted for a moment of real time, but I felt as if I had been brushed by a stirring from the Divine.

I still regard that moment as a divide in my life, for from it flowed two consequences: first, I knew that it was not only possible, but necessary for me to

seek a path to similar experiences; secondly, I could no longer believe in any narrowly construed anthropomorphic God-concept personified in human form. Indeed, the very use of the noun “God” seemed tenuous.

But as a result, I was set on a road of seeking which required that I leave Catholicism, impelled me towards a lifetime of searching for a context whose precepts, rituals and outlook might support my quest. Ultimately I found that the Torah encourages us to listen to both the still small voice within us and the great Shofar without.

Today when I meditate upon the meaning of Teshuvah (which—we are told—God created before the Universe) I think of the root meaning of the word—return. Return?...

...I recall reading a Hasidic tale which suggested that in some cases, when a Jewish soul

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. Visit our website at www.maldenbridgesynagogue.org



finds itself in a non-Jewish body, the act of conversion is actually a working out of Teshuvah. I have an uncanny sense that rather than "choosing Judaism" I have returned to my soul's spiritual home.

I have returned to my soul's spiritual home.

As to the substance of my experience, I have now read that when Rabbi Jacob Yitzhak was visiting the Baal Shem Tov's grandson, Rabbi Baruch, he gazed at his surroundings on the way to the Mikveh one Friday morning, and:

...the landscape changed with his thoughts.

When they got out of the carriage,
[Rabbi Baruch] asked 'What does the seer see?'

Rabbi Yitzhak replied 'The fields of the Holy Land.'

When they crossed the hill between the road and the stream,

[Rabbi Baruch] asked, 'What does the seer smell?'

He replied 'The air of the mountain of the Temple.'

When they dipped into the stream, [Rabbi Baruch] asked, 'What does the seer feel?'

And Rabbi Yitzhak answered: 'The healing stream of Paradise.'

View from the Bridge

SMB has been busy:

May--Shabbaton with Or Rose; Havdalah Potluck at the home of Shirley Bakal; Workshop "Rabbinic Storytelling" at the home of Alice and Burt Swersey; Tikkun Shavuot at the home of Janie and Larry Machiz.

June--Microcinema, "Capturing the Friedmans," Discussion led by Karen Levine; Shabbaton with Or Rose; Shabbat Potluck at the home of Mark Feder; Workshop "Judaism and the Environment" at the home of Carol Weir.

July--A Walk in the Sculpture Park at ART OMI led by Peter Franck; Shabbaton with Or Rose; Workshop "The Other in Judaism" at the home of Elaine and Art Greenberg; Tish B'Av Service at the home of Chuck Simon & Mary Katzin; Social Action Committee: Nutrition education for needy families through our local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.

August--An Evening of Poetry at the home of Saundra Segan; Aufruf for Julia Delain and Leonard Rubin; Shabbaton with Or Rose; Havdalah Potluck at the home of Karen and Sy Balsen; Workshop "Spiritual Preparations for the High Holydays" at the home of Shirley Bakal; Microcinema "Yossi & Jagger"

September--High Holy Day Services; SMB Members Rosh Hashana Potluck at the home of Karen Levine & Alan Gelb; Social Action Committee Holiday Visits to elderly Jewish residents at Barnwell Nursing Home

October--Sukkot Service and Potluck at the home of Mimi and Charles Lieber; Microcinema "James' Journey to Jerusalem"

November--Aufruf for Or Rose and Judith Rosenbaum; Shabbaton with Or Rose; Havdalah Potluck at the home of Alice & Burt Swersey; Workshop "Enhancing the Shabbat Experience: Text, Ritual & Celebration" at the home of Roberta and Mort Meyerson; Thanksgiving Community Interfaith Service with SMB representatives Annette Schickman and Isaiah Machiz

December--Hanukah Party Potluck at the home of Gloria & Arnold Kaufman; Social Action Committee Holiday Visits to elderly Jewish residents at Barnwell Nursing Home; Microcinema Christmas Night "Duck Soup"

January--Shabbaton with Or Rose; Workshop "Sacred Space- Sacred Time: Experiencing the Jewish Calendar Cycle" at the home of George and Janet Carey.

Ongoing: Distribution of reading materials to Columbia Memorial Hospital



Member's News

'In our small community, the efforts of every single member are invaluable. We are grateful for our members' contributions of talent, time, effort, and for their willingness to open their homes for community events. Hosting a Synagogue event is a special way to feel connected to this wonderful community we have created. If you are interested in doing that, please contact Alice Swersey at abswersey@taconic.net.

High Holidays Thank You's to:

Lori Burman, Gloria Kaufman, Jody Schoenfeld and Sheila Silver for leading Children's Services
Janie Machiz & Bella Meyer for flowers
All of the Torah and Haftarah chanters
Florence and Bernie Mehl and Beverly and Larry Bader---our Ushers
Mark Feder, Annette Schickman, Alice Swersey, Janet Carey for our Yom Kippur Break Fast
Everyone who helped set up, clean up, under Steve Ostrow's leadership
The Ritual Committee

Succoth Thank You's to:

Joel & Harry Merker, Rob Ross, Jo Bakal, Steve Ostrow and the Committee and Volunteers for our Sukkah, and to the Liebers for providing a spectacularly beautiful setting for our Sukkah.
To Sheila Silver & Ditte Nielsen for organizing the children's Sukkah decoration gathering.

Hanukah Thank You's to:

The Social Action Committee for Pre-Holiday Nursing Home visits
Nancy Rothman for reading at the Annual SMB Hanukah Party
Everyone who helped organize the Children's Hanukah Party

Mazel Tov to:

Or Rose & Judith Rosenbaum on their marriage.
Arthur & Elaine Greenberg on the birth of their grandsons, Gareth

Daniel Jones and Naim Aviv Greenberg-Nielsen.

Mark Greenberg and Ditte Nielsen on the birth of their son (and Elaine and Arthur's grandson), Naim Aviv.

Evan Messinger and Maxann Beja on the birth of their son and daughter, twins Archie and Lana
Kate Merker, daughter of Joanne Gerstel & Joel Merker on graduating first in her class at the Culinary Institute of America
Barbara Lax on opening her new shop "The Well Dressed Cake" in Malden Bridge

Thank You for hosting programs

Charles and Mimi Lieber, Shirley Bakal, Mort and Roberta Meyerson, Gloria and Arnold Kaufman, Bert and Alice Swersey, Sy and Karen Balsen, Elaine and Arthur Greenberg, Lee Gould, Alan Gelb and Karen Levine.

Thank You for Sponsoring Kiddushim

Beverly and Larry Bader (and for your gift subscription to the Jersalum Post.)
Sondra and Stan Applebaum
Elaine and Arthur Greenberg
Gloria and Arnold Kaufman
The Social Action Committee

Condolences to

Charlie Braverman on the death of his mother
Mark Dickerman on the death of his father
Joe and Sydelle Roth on the death of Sydelle's mother, Faye Hiller.

Get Well Wishes to:

Carol Weir

Thank you for your contributions:

Fred and Ellen Levine, Harriet Yelin in memory of Bert Yellin, his parents Anna and Louis Yellin, and Harriet's parents Adele and David Grant, Burt and Alice Swersey, Philip and Anita Pearlman, Larry and Beverly Bader, Bernie and Florence Mehl, Yotam Lev and Gili Melamed Lev, Evan Messinger and Maxann Beja, Leonard W. Krouner, Stephen Kaufman, Shirley Bakal: in memory of Carl Bakal, Pauline Blumen, Robert and Ellen Lieberman, Robert and Nancy Wilson, Daniel and Sally Block in honor of their grandson, Max Gottesman's Bar Mitzvah in Jerusalem this past July, Bernie and Lydia Kukoff, Jonathan and Penny Metsch, Jeffery and Cheryl Cohen, Alvin and Donna Knoll; Robert J. Rosegarten; Richard Katz and Debra Kalmuss; Bart and Jody Schoenfeld; George and Janet Carey; Mort and Roberta Meyerson; Stanley and Lenore Appenzeller; Guy and Lori Burman; Howard Cort; Diane Leibovitz; Donald and Dorothy Zaentz; Arthur and Elaine Greenberg in honor of the birth of their grandsons Gareth Daniel Jones and Naim Aviv Greenberg-Nielsen, and several anonymous donors.



Point of View

Two Poems by Lee Gould

Dinner Party #1

I fell in love with Les and Martha both
but especially him when he said
my house was wonderful, fun
a tree house

now the buckwheat's grown
into a blanket of green –
fluted, feathered, undulating
as though someone were nestling in,

perhaps that's it,
if it's fun to live here, is it fun to live?

I was frightened by my happiness
I looked into my plate of perfect food
then out the window –
could I let my exaltation show,
my pick up and fly
in these such ordinary circumstances?

I'm not a balloon I thought
people prick just for fun
or as my mother would've said
to get back to normal

It was time to laugh, I told a funny story.

Suppose you yearn to be alone, really

Suppose you yearn to be alone, really
alone so you can think about what's
what, find out
a thing or two.

You jump at the chance to live
in an old one-room schoolhouse, overlooking
snowy woods and meadows.

Suppose one day a yellowish swath appears
on the gray quilted horizon,
the mountains wind across the sky,
then dissolve

leaving a sullen silent world in
a stillness so complete, it
softens your bones
into agreement.

No sleep-fogged flies buzz at back windows,
no wasps drift down from curtain folds.

Suppose in that moment, time doesn't
exist, that you,
like the snow-heavy spruce
are alone,

that aloneness in fact is
the essence of you, its grip
so strong your need

to get to the bottom of things is
what you want most
to wash your hands of.

An SMB member for two years now, Lee moved to Columbia County from Baltimore, where she taught English at Goucher College.



COMING UP

Winter doesn't slow us down at SMB. Please join us for the following programs and always feel free to bring your friends.

Saturday February 5 7:30 P.M. GENEALOGY WORKSHOP

Genealogy has become one of the nation's most popular pastimes. Jean Nudd, archivist with the National Archives and Records Administration in Pittsfield and a frequent guest on WAMC, will conduct a genealogy workshop for SMB, explaining how to trace our ancestors through available government data. We will also be showing the 30-minute film BRANCHING OUT, in which Arthur Kurzweil, the famous anthropologist, focuses the discussion specifically on Jewish genealogy.

Saturday March 12 7:00 PM. SHANGHAI GHETTO

In 1939, thousands of Jewish refugees escaped Nazi persecution to the only place in the world that was open to people without entrance visas: Shanghai. In 2000, filmmakers Dana Jankowicz-Mann and Amir Mann sneaked into China with a digital camera to shoot at the site of the Jewish Ghetto in Shanghai, unchanged since World War II. They took with them two survivors of the Ghetto, going back to where they lived during the War under Japanese occupation. The award-winning feature-length documentary that ensued includes interviews with survivors and historians, rare letters, stock footage, still photos and footage shot in modern day Shanghai. The film is narrated by Martin Landau.

On hand for this very special evening at SMB will be Dr. Sigmund Tobias, Distinguished Research Scientist, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University on a part-time basis. Dr. Tobias, a resident of Pittsfield, is one of the five former members of the refugee community who was interviewed for the film and is the author of a book on the Shanghai Ghetto entitled STRANGE HAVEN. Copies of the book will be available at the screening.

"Fascinating"—Stanley Kauffman, The New Republic.
"Miraculous"—Bruce Diones, The New Yorker.

Saturday April 2 4:00 PM RUTH CALDERON STUDY SESSION, HAVDALAH SERVICE/POT LUCK

As the "Hymn of Glory" in Shabbat Musaf says, "He is close to me when I call Him." Shabbat gives us the opportunity to experience closeness—to our deeper selves, to others, and to God. With our honored guest, distinguished scholar, Ruth Calderon, we will look at texts that speak of the concept of closeness and explore their meaning for us. The study session will immediately be followed by a Havdalah Service and a Pot Luck Supper, location to be announced.

Ruth Calderon is the Scholar in residence at UJA Federation of New York and the founder of Alma College in Tel Aviv and Alma NY. Ruth founded Elul, a religiously and politically pluralistic beit midrash in Jerusalem. After earning her MA in Talmud from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, she went on to create HaCheder, a popular TV weekly that deals with issues found in classic and modern Hebrew texts. Currently, Ruth's book "The Market. The Home. The Heart." is being translated into English. She is completing her Doctorate in Talmud.



Welcome to Our New Members

Starting with this newsletter, as we welcome new members, we hope to tell you a bit about them. We weren't able to gather information on all of our new members by our deadline, however. Perhaps next time...

Mark and Beatrice Horowitz

Mark, a retired computer systems engineer, and Beatrice, a retired social worker, moved to Valatie two years ago from Brookline, Massachusetts. They have two sons, one in New York and one in Seattle. Together, they enjoy traveling, and Beatrice also likes to paint, write, and has recently taken up horseback riding.

Avi and Natasha Dresner

Avi and Natasha met 11 years ago at a Jewish summer camp sponsored by the Reform movement in Ukraine, where Natasha is from. Seven years later they found each other again, and have been married for three and a half years now. They first learned about Chatham from the article about the town that appeared in the New York Times "Escape" section. Committed to moving up from the city, they've actually wound up living in Pittsfield, where Natasha is the Synagogue Coordinator

at Knesset Israel. Avi makes his living working as a personal trainer in New York City two days a week while he finishes his novel. They have no children yet, but are working toward getting a black Labrador Retriever. Natasha likes collecting (full) miniature liquor bottles and little glass animals, hedgehogs particularly. Avi enjoys asking Natasha why she has so many liquor bottles and hedgehogs. Otherwise, they are both into movies and theater.

Isadore and Toby Cassuto

Isadore is retired from practicing as a tax lawyer, but is still active on behalf of a client or two. Toby taught fifth and sixth grade. They have two sons, a professor of literature and a professor of law, and two grandchildren. They bought their house in Spencertown 31 years ago, having fallen in love with its peonies and tulips. "Then we learned all about walls and floors and steam heat

and storm windows," says Toby. "We had been apartment dwellers all our lives. This was a long-term learning experience. We learned how to find help."

Ed and Jean Stoler

Ed and Jean, weekenders for 19 years, have been living full-time in the country for the last two and a half years. Jean, a women's clothing designer and mosaic artist, and Ed, a VP of sales for an international textile company, are now real estate agents. Their four children all live in New York City, and so far there is one grandchild (six months old). Jean is the daughter of Holocaust survivors; Ed attended a yeshiva as a young boy.

SMB also welcomes new members:

**Beverly and Larry Bader
Phyllis and Paul Levine
Laurie and Mark Graff
Barbara Lax and Ken Kranz
Heather and John Spitzer**

SMB Mission Statement

We believe in equality at the Bimah, in a vital and searching study of Torah, in maintaining the tradition of Hebrew as part of the service, and in the ability of each individual to find his or her own meaningful relationship with Jewish culture, heritage, and religion. We believe a synagogue should play a central role in that pursuit, that a Jewish community is a blessing, and that being part of one is a mitzvah.

CONGREGATIONAL GOALS

- To provide a home for egalitarian religious worship in accordance with the principles of Judaism.
- To encourage and deepen a love and knowledge of Jewish practices, principles, and culture among our members.
- To be a source of education for our members, future generations, and the larger Jewish community.



TZEDAKAH:

Giving and Receiving

Wrapped Up in One Box



By Jody Schoenfeld

Most of us think of “tzedakah” as synonymous with the word “charity”. However, the root of this Hebrew word is “Tzade-Dalet-Qof” which actually means righteousness, fairness, or justice. This suggests not simply the giving of a generous gift to a worthy cause, but an obligation to give because it is needed, it is just, and it is the right thing to do. In the Judaic tradition, assisting the needy is a moral and spiritual obligation. Tzedakah is one of the acts that allow us to be given forgiveness. A tzedakah box or “pushke” as it is known in Yiddish is much like a Jewish “piggy” bank with a humanitarian purpose.

Before moving to Columbia County I was a personal fitness trainer in Bayside, New York. Many of my clients were Orthodox Jews. While instructing them in proper exercise form, they happily educated me in Judaic practice and custom. One woman in particular, with whom I had a wonderful relationship, felt it her moral and ethical responsibility to mold me by bits and pieces into her ideal of a perfect Jew. This involved attempting to teach me some rudimentary Hebrew, leading me to the “right” websites for daily inspiration, making me sample her “bathtub” borsht every year before Passover, and giving me gifts that always had a Judaic theme. One of these gifts was a beautiful mahogany and silver tzedakah box.

Along with the gift of the tzedakah box she gave specific instructions on its use. I was to dedicate any funds put into it for a

specific purpose or charity and once those funds were in the box, they would only come out of the box to contribute to that end. In other words, if I needed some quarters for parking meters or change for buses, I could not use the box money (unless it was promptly replaced). I decided that I would use this box to make a contribution to the synagogue to be used where the need was greatest. I now keep the box in my laundry room. Since I’m always doing laundry, it serves as a constant physical reminder of a spiritual obligation. People are always putting things in the laundry with change in their pockets, so of course this goes into the box. Every time I find some loose change, in the box it goes. Every time there is a happy occasion to be grateful for, or a prayer is answered, a contribution goes into the box. Every time a long trip is completed in safety, a sum for getting there and a sum for coming back goes in the box as well (also a custom she had taught me). Over the course of the year the box slowly fills up. When it is full, it is emptied, counted and contributed.

Many people already have some kind of receptacle for loose change at home:

a jar, a can, a piggy bank, a dish or bowl. This could be your tzedakah box. It can also be a great gift for any occasion and a wonderful tradition that can be passed on to future generations, family and friends.

Whenever I put money into my tzedaka box, I not only fulfill an obligation as a Jew, but I think of the person who gave it to me and smile. She finally succeeded in giving me the perfect gift of Judaica: it keeps on giving as it is receiving.

TSUNAMI RELIEF

Many of us are thinking about ways that we can be helpful to the victims of one of the worst natural disasters in history. The following organizations might be of interest:

1. UJA-Federation of New York Tsunami Relief Fund--
https://secure2.convio.net/uja/site/Donation?ACTION=SHOW_DONATION_OPTIONS&CAMPAIGN_ID=1582&JServSessionIdr010=6132qou6r1.app26a
2. American Jewish World Service
http://www.ajws.org/index.cfm?section_id=15
3. Carol Bloch, a Chatham resident who has visited SMB on a number of occasions, lived in Indonesia for many years. Carol is working with a number of individuals who are in Indonesia organizing relief efforts. If you are interested in contributing at this grass roots level, you can contact Carol at candradylan@aol.com or call her at 392-8101.



OR ROSE: TOPICS FOR UP- COMING SHABBATONS

November 13-14
Enhancing the Shabbat
Experience: Text, Ritual,
Celebration

January 14-15
Sacred Space, Sacred Time:
Exploring the Jewish Calender
Cycle

March 5-6
The God(s) of Judaism: A

Theological & Historical
Exploration---I: The God of the
Bible

April 15-16
The God(s) of Judaism: A
Theological & Historical
Exploration---II: The God of the
Rabbis (Talmud and Midrash)

May 20-22
The God(s) of Judaism: A

Theological & Historical
Exploration---III: The God of
Maimonides & the Mystics

June 12
The God (s) of Judaism: A
Theological & Historical
Exploration---IV: God in
Modern Jewish Thought

Or will also arrange for a Shavuot learning session. As he has done in the past, he will ask participants do some advance reading in preparation for meeting.



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