



THE CHATHAM SYNAGOGUE

NETIVOT TORAH תורה נתיבות

Sivan Tammuz 5765 Vol. VI, Number 3 June/July 2005

Tuesdays With Izzy

by Alan Gelb

In which the playwright seeks counsel from his late father-in-law, a Master Builder of Shuls.

Setting: A cluttered office. Alan, slumped at his desk, lets the phone ring and ring.

IZZY (at first a disembodied voice): Aren't you going to answer it?

Alan, startled, sits up straight. Izzy gradually comes into view.

ALAN: Oh. It's you.

IZZY: Aren't you going to answer the phone?

ALAN: No. It's the seventh synagogue call of the day. And it's not even noon.

IZZY: What do you expect? You're building a shul.

The phone stops ringing.

IZZY: That's not very polite.

ALAN: I just need a little time to myself.

IZZY: Fine. I'll go.

ALAN: No! Stay. We need to talk.

IZZY: What's the matter?

ALAN: You never told me it was going to be this much work—that's the matter.

IZZY: What do you mean?

ALAN: To you, building a shul came naturally. You built two of them—in Bayside and Sun City West—

IZZY: And it was a very great pleasure.

ALAN: —but it's different with me. Building a shul is not exactly up my alley.

IZZY: And being Vice President of a shul is? Come on. You're doing fine.

ALAN: But I was never even bar mitzvahed!

IZZY: That can wait. You have other fish to fry. So tell me—what's your budget?

ALAN: \$300,000.

IZZY: Soup to nuts?

ALAN: Just about.

IZZY: But that's a piece of cake.

ALAN: Easy for you to say.

IZZY: How much have you raised so far?

ALAN: Almost \$200,000.

IZZY: Well, there you go!

ALAN: But we're not there yet.

IZZY: Look—if you believe in something, you can sell it. Do you believe in this shul?

ALAN: Of course I do. This is the first new permanent synagogue in Columbia County in almost a century. It's the first one ever in the northern end of the county—

IZZY: Keep talking.

ALAN: We deserve to have a home of our own. We're a vital congregation. We've grown from a dozen individuals to over 80 member units in just five years—

IZZY: Member units. Spoken like an officer.

ALAN: Lots of people have located their spirituality through us. Lots of people have made really valuable connections, and there's a vital sense of Jewish community here—

IZZY: You see? I always said you should go to shul.

ALAN: I had to find the right one. And I have. This synagogue is different. It's sim-

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ple...modest...

Alan can see that his father-in-law has no context for such words with regard to synagogues.

ALAN: It works for all kinds of people on all kinds of levels.

IZZY: So then what's the problem? You've convinced me.

ALAN: Good. 'Cause we just cashed in that Israeli bond you gave us 17 years ago so we could make a contribution.

IZZY: Excellent! Well, I've got to run—

ALAN: Why? You just got here.

IZZY: Sorry. There's a condo meeting—

ALAN: But...but...I haven't even told you about the construction. We'll be in the new building by mid-May.

IZZY: There you go! You're doing great!

Izzy fades away. The phone rings. Alan lets it ring...once...twice...and then picks it up.

ALAN: Hello? Oh, hi, Lydia. (BEAT) Another meeting? When? (He looks at his calendar) But I've already got one scheduled that morning. Okay, okay. I'm putting it down.

Alan hangs up. Time to get back to work. The lights dim.

Finding Our Name

by George Carey

How do you rename a family: a hamish congregation of friends and seekers after Torah? Our old name, "The Synagogue at Malden Bridge" had so much resonance for so many of us. How were we to relinquish it, and replace it upon moving to our wonderful new quarters?

As the Board considered these questions, we faced a dilemma. On the one hand, our old name identified our location. Yet, being site-specific, it was generically non-transferable to another address. And wouldn't a new locational name repeat the same problem?

Yet some of us objected to a traditional Hebrew name which, although avoiding place-specificity, might pose a problem of intelligibility for others.

Complicating the picture was the sudden speed with which the opportunity opened up for us to acquire our new building—after months of indecision on the part of the sellers. We needed to be able to establish our new identity as soon as possible.

At this point, we solicited suggestions from our creative congregation. What this enabled us to do was to choose from various offerings in both Hebrew and English and send out a choice of names for a vote by the congregation. The results were very gratifying. A substantial number of member families ratified our new name—which incorporates both a Hebrew and an English portion: Netivot Torah: The Chatham Synagogue.

Netivot Torah in Hebrew may be translated as Pathways to Torah. It really seems that it was made for us. After all, what is the central tradition which characterizes our Shabbat service if not our reading and discussion of the Torah in English? As a congregation we also seek to be welcoming to all Jews regardless of denominational affinity: "netivot" is a plural noun: there exists more than one pathway to the Torah—and every Saturday we explore them.

So welcome to our new home—where a dedicated congregation of seekers approaches the Torah, each on a personal Netivah, which converge upon the eternal text.

NOTICE

At the annual congregational meeting to be held on July 17, 2005 at noon, following Or Rose's Sunday workshop, we will hold a vote to amend the by-laws and the certificate of incorporation of the synagogue to change the name from The Synagogue at Malden Bridge to The Chatham Synagogue and to add Netivot Torah as an ancillary Hebrew name.



Member's News

We have had an overwhelmingly supportive response from our membership and from the friends and families of our members to our appeal for help with the purchase and renovation of our new building. For the time being, we want to offer a heartfelt, generalized thank you for your contributions of talent, energy and money. In an upcoming newsletter we will have an opportunity to acknowledge your contributions more personally.

Thank you to:

The hosts for the Or Rose Shabbaton

Workshops: Janet & George
Carey, Jody & Bart Schoenfeld,
Mimi & Charles Lieber.

Larry & Janie Machiz for hosting the
April Pot Luck Havdalah with
Ruth Calderon.

Janet Carey for coordinating the
January Capital Repertory Theater
Party.

Joyce Sarner for coordinating the
Genealogy Talk by Jean Nudd.

Kiddush Hosts: Elaine & Art
Greenberg, Sandra Segan, Lydia
& Bernie Kukoff, Gloria & Arnie
Kaufman, Bella Meyer & Martin
Kace.

Discussion Group hosts: Florence &
Bernie Mehl, Roberta & Mort
Meyerson, Gloria & Arnie
Kaufman.

Annette Schickman, Barbara Lax and
Joyce Sarner for the reception at
the March Theater Party at
Stageworks.

Tobby Cassuto for the reception after
the film Shanghai Ghetto.

Florence Mehl and Jody Schoenfeld
for holiday visits to area nursing

homes.

Gloria & Arnie Kaufman for hosting
Shabbat Services.

Alice & Burt Swersey and the
Shadowbrook Nursery for the
Fund-Raiser Plant Sale.

Condolences to:

Joanne Gerstel & Joel Merker on the
death of Joanne's father Julius
Gerstel.

Mazel Tov to:

Gloria Kaufman and Sandra Segan
on their respective 70th Birthdays.

Sandra Segan on the occasion of her
grandson Oliver's Bar Mitzvah.

Martin Kace & Bella Meyer on the
occasions of Ruth's Bat Mitzvah
and Lia's graduation from high
school and acceptance to Vassar
College.

Alice & Burt Swersey on the birth of
grand daughter Rebecca Ananda
Wagenheim.

Beverly & Larry Bader on the birth of
granddaughter Eleanor Miriam
Bader-Lazaroff.

Diane Liebovitz on her Rabbinic ordi-
nation.

Dorothy & Donald Zaentz for the
marriage of their son Jonathan
Andrew to Lisa Beth Rosenfeld on
February 20 in Chicago.

Roberta Meyerson for exhibits of her
artwork in area galleries.

Roberta & Mort Meyerson for the
upcoming marriage of their son
Alex to Melissa Kogan.

Lucile Lichtblau for the performance
of her play "Sorrento" at
Stageworks.

Nancy Rothman for her performances
with Barrington Stage Company.

Jody & Bart Schoenfeld on the occa-
sion of their son Adam's engage-
ment to Jennifer Gruber.

Lynn & Frank Peseckis on Noah's
graduation from Simon's Rock
College and acceptance to Loyola
University in New Orleans and on
Sarah's graduation from Berkshire
Country Day School and accep-
tance to Hampshire College.

Lenore & Stan Appenzeller on their
fiftieth anniversary.

Lydia & Bernie Kukoff on their forti-
eth anniversary.

Karen Levine & Alan Gelb on their
thirtieth anniversary.

Kindershul Activities

Our program has been emphasizing Jewish Holidays, including Hanukah, Purim, and Passover. Patricia Moger, Kindershul teacher, usually includes a craft project and story centered on the holiday theme. For Passover, the children made place-mat pictures representing the Seder plate. For Purim, Patricia told the story and then the children acted it out in costume. The group has been small this year and we are always looking for more families to join us. Our next theme is the founding and meaning of Israel.

Thank you to hosts for Kindershul programs including; Melanie Sesserman, Sheila Silver, Laura Etlinger, Lori & Guy Berman



The Little Shul That Could: Update on Fund Raising

by *Barbara Lax*

On February 13th our Development Committee met for the first time to begin the crucial process of raising the necessary monies for the purchase and renovation of our new home in Chatham Center. The 12 person committee developed a multifaceted campaign that included telephone solicitation, direct mail, events, and community involvement. The goal was to raise \$300,000 and to have 100% participation from all SMB families. The \$300,000 would include the purchase price of \$225,000 with the balance set for renovations to bring the building to code and do the necessary alterations to meet our basic needs. The initial response has been stellar. In three short months, we have been able to raise \$198,000 in cash and pledges and \$75,000 in short term loans.

As a professional fund raiser for over twenty years, I was overwhelmed by the response and generosity of so many, and in our next newsletter we will thank every individual who contributed, but right now we must continue our focus on the business at hand. The numbers clearly indicate we

have a distance to go to reach our goal of \$300,000, and every dollar we raise is crucial. Even with the \$75,000 in loans, we have a shortfall of \$25,000 and all of these loans need to be paid off. We have a number of exciting events planned during the summer, about which you can read more in this issue, yet these alone will not cover our current building needs.

To date 68% of SMB families have contributed. This is an impressive number but clearly short of the 100% goal. Many may feel that they can only contribute a few dollars and that the amount will not make a difference. Each and every penny however is critical.

Perhaps a look at a breakdown of some specific costs will better put this into perspective. A bathroom faucet costs \$29.95 and the faucet for the kitchen \$39.95. Therefore for \$30 or \$40 you can help supply the shul with running water. Each light fixture for the sanctuary costs \$200 and we need fifteen of them. Each chair costs \$36. How appropriate to send an

amount equal to a double, triple or quadruple chai to secure seating for all. While we are not having naming opportunities, imagine the pride one might feel walking through the synagogue doorway and spotting one of these items, knowing your contribution made that possible. If you have not contributed, please take this solicitation seriously. We need each and every member's support

We are most appreciative to the people who have given short term loans to assure that the construction continues while we actively raise money. Cash is needed now! If you can help the synagogue with a loan or know someone who would consider doing so, please email me at bal2ee@aol.com. This can be an invaluable way to lend support.

We have much to be proud of. Our small rural congregation has come together to accomplish what many believed could not be done. We're really doing it! Please search deep in your heart and your pockets and determine how you can help us reach our goal.



Point of View

Hillel vs. The Hummer: A Drosch on Tu B'Shevat

by Richard Katz

And Ha Shem took the man, and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. Gen 2:15

This January 25, we celebrated Tu B'Shevat (tet-vav for 15; the 15th day of the month Shevat); the day trees begin to bud in Israel, and one of four traditional reckonings of the new year. The holiday originated from fiscal necessity. An accurate account of a tree's age was critical for tithing (see Lev 19:23-25); the first three year's of a tree's fruit were not to be eaten; the fourth was dedicated to Hashem. Subsequent years' fruit could then be eaten.

The festival refracts both history and our sensitivity to the present world. Strictly speaking Tu B'Shevat is not a Torah holiday, although the Mishnah mentions a difference of observance between the schools of Hillel and Shammai (so what else is new?). The tradition of a Tu B'Shevat Seder (chemdat hayamim) dates to the Lurianic Kabbalists of Safed and is based upon the esoteric notion "man is like a tree of the field" (Deut 20:19). The Seder bears some formal resemblance to the Passover Seder, with four cups of wine and four types of fruit, however it is symbolically distinct, with the wine, progressively a mixture of red and white, evoking the seasons, the four mystical worlds, and four types of people. The Seder was originally organized around atonement for the first sin of eating from the tree of knowledge.

More recent observance is motivated less by an attempt at spiritual repair and more by 19th - 20th century Zionism, and ecological sensitivity. Early pioneers used the occasion of Tu B'Shevat to plant trees, and the Jewish National Fund's reforestation efforts have used the holiday as a National arbor day. In addition, and germane to our life as a congregation, the holiday offers an opportunity to reflect upon our duties to the fragile planet we inhabit.

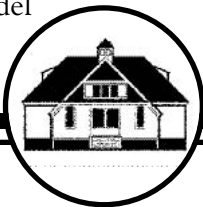
The Torah offers an evolving view of this obligation. Genesis 1:26-31 argues for a model of human domination "let them dominate the fish of the sea and birds of the skies,

and domestic animals and all the earth". By the time of Noah, G-d provides a rainbow as "a covenant sign between me and the earth" that all flesh would never again be cut off by flood. Deuteronomy 20 describes rules of siege, prohibiting the destruction of fruit-bearing trees for the creation of siege-works. Kol B'Omer this leads to a general commandment of Bal Tashchit (not to destroy wantonly). Perhaps the closest notion to true stewardship is Lev 25:23 "The land must not be sold beyond reclaim for the land is mine" Nonetheless, the Torah will never be The Whole Earth Catalog, nor even Coevolution quarterly, for that matter; and Tu B'Shevat is not Earth Day, but a more ramified festival of planting and history.

Tu B'Shevat does however remind us of our planetary obligation. It may be ailing but this is the only planet we've got, so we'd better care for it. An obvious starting point is just making less garbage. As a congregation we can commit to using biodegradable materials, and recyclables. Using local produce saves energy and supports our neighbors. There is, moreover, a certain satisfaction in keeping old things going—the major energy cost of a car is not its daily operation, but its initial manufacture (here let me recommend Mary Chapin Carpenter's "This Old Shirt".) In any case if we are to live in time as well as space, (a notion arguably more Abe-Josh's than Mary C's,) then we cannot unthinkingly discard the old.

The good news and the bad news are the same. There is always work. We can do more. We will.

[Adapted more or less from Or Rose's talk on sacred space at George and Janet's this past January]



Choosing Judaism: A Father Speaks to his Bar Mitzvah Son

by Jonathan Kalb

Oliver, it's no exaggeration to say that our family has you to thank for bringing Judaism into our lives, or in my case back into our lives, in a meaningful way. There's nothing like having a child to focus the minds of grownup people and force them to confront some of those sticky questions that are so easy to sidestep and ignore when it's merely themselves on the radar screen.

A child's questions about God and religion can be unnervingly blunt and candid, especially when the child is as bright, as articulate and as unappeasable with pat answers as you have always been. The sincerity of the questions and the desire to give real answers pries open all the leaky arguments, flimsy alibis and convenient expedients that we adults use to plug up our doubts and silence our inconvenient inner voices as we move through the pressures and responsibilities of busy lives.

I remember a parent meeting several years ago with Rabbi Talia Feldman, the former head of the Hebrew School here at Beth Elohim, which I don't think you attended; it took place shortly after you began Hebrew School here. At this meeting Rabbi Feldman—a wonderfully open-hearted and open-minded person who did everything possible to make us comfortable and welcome in this synagogue—spoke offhandedly about, "...you know, all those 11 and 12-year-old questions..." that the 5th and 6th-graders had been asking: questions such as, "If God knows

English, why does he need to be spoken to in Hebrew?" and "If God wants us to ask for things, why doesn't he ever answer us?" and "If God is perfect and self-sufficient, why does he need our praise?"

Rabbi Feldman hadn't intended to stop there, she was plainly on her way to making some other, more sophisticated and grownup point, but as soon as she listed these questions, a dozen hands shot into the air—parents' hands—and she couldn't continue. The next hour's discussion made it painfully clear how invested the adults were in all those "11 and 12-year old questions." That day made me feel both more at home in this community and more linked to you and your experience here.

To me, Oliver, the really precious gift of your Hebrew education is that it has brought this quintessentially Jewish tradition of unashamed, unconstrained open inquiry into our home. The discussions you and I have had over the past few years in our house and during our 12-block walk between home and temple have brought me great joy, and I hope that's true for you too. You're lucky to have a torah parashah that embraces the foundational myth of the Jewish religion, the story of the golden calf—a story in which, as you once pointed out to me, almost no one seems to know what God is, no one except Moses, that is.

Rabbi Weider has explained to us that this story is as much about an absence—Moses' absence on

Mount Sinai for 40 days—as it is about any doctrine, which is a fairly abstract and sophisticated point. It's not every 13-year-old who could savor this point in all its rich complexity. But you, God bless you, could and can. In your inimitable gentle, compassionate, disarmingly terse and articulate way, you can cut right to the heart of big, complicated things, and the idea, that God is always up for discussion in Judaism, because we refuse to objectify him, was a cinch for you.

So today on your bar mitzvah, I want to thank you, Oliver, for your curiosity, your strong and loving spirit with your extraordinary ability to sense the feelings of others, your facility with words, and your wonderful, sensible, probing mind—all of which have pushed our family to engage meaningfully with these magnificent Jewish questions. Today your family and community welcome you as a full-fledged participant in a very long and ongoing discussion. Whatever else this day might mean (and I know you're looking forward to your party afterward—who wouldn't be?), I hope you'll also think of your bar mitzvah as a day on which you share the fruits of long study with us, and we tell you that we are listening and taking you seriously. To me, that's the most important message of this day, and maybe the most enduring meaning of the coming-of-age ritual: for all of us to tell you publicly what your mother and I have always known: that what you have to say matters.

Note: Jonathan Kalb is the son of member Sandra Segan.



COMING UP

Sunday July 10, 2005 3:00 PM. MY GRANDFATHER CHAGALL

In support of our new building, synagogue member Bella Meyer will present a remembrance of her grandfather, Marc Chagall, at North Pointe Cultural Arts Center Kinderhook, with a reception to follow. Bella, who holds a doctorate in medieval art history from the Sorbonne, is the head of all Chagall affairs in the United States. As a child and young woman, she sat easel-side to her grandfather, while he created his extraordinary paintings at his home in the south of France. "He'd talk and show me things and he'd paint," says Bella. "He was this very cute little person who had this incredible amount of energy coming out of his hands." Art is woven through the fabric of Bella's family. Her mother, Ida, Chagall's daughter, was also a painter, and Bella's father, who was Swiss, was a museum director. Bella's twin sister, Meret, administers Chagall affairs from her home in Paris. Bella goes all over the world speaking about her grandfather and his work. We are very fortunate and grateful that she will be addressing our group. Tickets are \$25 and seating is limited. To reserve a place, please send a check, made out to The Chatham Synagogue, to Alice Swersey. 56 Goodrich Hollow Road, Stepentown, NY 12168

First Run Features---(at least in Columbia County!)

The Believer

Thursday July 21 7:30PM

This controversial Grand Jury Prize winner at the Sundance Film Festival concerns a young Jewish man who adopts a fiercely anti-Semitic worldview. Loosely based on a true story of a KKK member who was revealed to be Jewish by a New York Times reporter, it features a brilliant performance by newcomer Ryan Gosling. 98 minutes.

"Provocative...unnerving" —*The New York Times*

Broken Wings

Thursday August 18 7:30PM

This aching but luminous domestic drama, named Best Feature by the Israeli Film Academy, is the story of a widow's effort to hold her family together. Hebrew with English subtitles. 87 minutes.

"Heartfelt acting and a sometimes tragic but life-affirming story makes this an unusually touching Israeli production" — *Christian Science Monitor*

Sunday July 24, 2005 3:00 PM. OPEN HOUSE WITH OUR ARCHITECT

Joel Merker will take us through the process of creating our space--a space that beautifully reflects the identity of our congregation and our commitment to modesty and simplicity.

SAVE THE DATES--Details to follow

August 21, 2005.

THE DEDICATION AND CELEBRATION OF OUR NEW BUILDING

September 4, 2005

TAG SALE TO BENEFIT OUR NEW BUILDING



A DOOR CLOSSES...A DOOR OPENS

by Elaine Greenberg

Our congregation sat in the meeting room of the Methodist Church which had been so welcoming and hospitable to us over the past five years. It was a sunny day in May, as we davened the Aleinu in this familiar place for the last time. Next Shabbat, we would meet in our new shul—a place of our own, a dream come true and yet....

It was surely a bittersweet emotion that I felt, parting from a place which holds the sweetest of memories.

It was here—five years ago—that my granddaughter Liana had her baby naming on a warm beautiful morning. The doors were wide open and small children played on the grass.

With a fitting symmetry, this last Winter, my two baby grandsons had a baby blessing on a cold day in

the chilly sanctuary warmed by the tender feelings of our congregation.

The Simcha which immediately comes to mind, however, is the congregational procession which wound from our house to our shul, across the frolicking waters of Kinderhook Creek, to the melodies of a Klezmer group, bearing our glorious new Torah Scroll, sheltered by a Hupah.

And looking around the room, I see the friendly, familiar faces of my fellow daveners, and reflect that each of them has a uniquely personal set of warm recollections of our shared experiences in this place.

No, leaving these familiar walls will not be easy, but behind the opening doors of our new building lies a new and special home for our Torah, and the many Simchas which we will celebrate there. Many future sweet memories are waiting for us there.



The Chatham Synagogue
Netivot Torah
Box 18, Malden Bridge, New York 12115