

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey

Journal

February 2008

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www.jcnwj.org

PO Box 2, 115 Youmans Avenue, Washington, NJ 07882/ 908-689-0762

Mark Your Calendar!

- Saturday, Feb. 2, 10:30am Torah Study
- Sunday, Feb. 3 9:30am Sunday School 10:45am Pirke Avot class 12:15pm Cooking Club
- Monday, Feb. 4, 7:30pm Board Meeting
- Wednesdays, Feb 6-27, 7:00pm Adults Hebrew Reading class
- Friday, Feb. 8, 7:45pm Shabbat Service, Oneg: Koppenhaver, Romanczyk, Shelofsky families
- Sunday, Feb. 10 9:30am Sunday School (K/1), Music with Cantor Kadin 9:30am Men's Club breakfast 9:30am-2:00pm Blood Drive 10:30am Confirmation
- Saturday, Feb. 16, 10:30am Torah Study
- Sunday, Feb. 17 No Sunday School President's Day
- Thursday, Feb. 21, 7:30pm Gourmet Kosher Wine Tasting
- Friday, Feb. 22, 7:45pm Lay-led Shabbat Service Oneg: Gross, Moyer, McNamara families
- Sunday, Feb. 24 9:30am Sunday School
- Friday, March 7 Shabbat Across America 6:00pm service 7:00pm dinner

Rabbi Lewis's sermons are now on our Website! Visit us at www.jcnwj.org

Rabbi's Message

I was walking down Broadway towards Union Square when I heard all kinds of shouting. What could this protest be about, I wondered? As I got closer, I realized that I was hearing political campaigners trying to out shout each other. While the supporters of John Edwards were fairly muted, the supporters of Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton grew louder and louder as I got closer. It was like being at a subway series and listening to Yankees and Mets fans trying to outdo each other. It was all good-natured and pretty routine for Union Square.

Then I walked into a theater on 13th Street to see a play called "New Jerusalem – The Interrogation of Baruch de Spinoza at Talmud Torah Congregation: Amsterdam, July 27, 1656." Suddenly I realized how much I had taken for granted the free speech that had made me smile in Union Square. Spinoza was born in 1632 to Portuguese Jews who had been evicted from Portugal and were living in Amsterdam. According to the playwright David Ives, those Portuguese Jews had made legal compromises with the Amsterdam government in order to be permitted to stay in Amsterdam. Those compromises limited their social activity (e.g., no marrying non-Jews) and their freedom of speech. Spinoza himself was a freethinker who was originally groomed to be a successor to the community's rabbi, but who later became a philosopher whose views offended the Jewish community and jeopardized their

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President's Message

Most of the following material has been taken from Wikipedia sources. My only contribution is an attempt to synthesize them into my "way of thinking."

Equal Justice Under Law is a phrase engraved on the front of the United States Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C. The fourteenth amendment, ratified on July 9, 1868, guarantees "equal protection of the laws." Supreme Court Justice Noah Swayne characterized these enactments as follows: "Fairly construed, these amendments may be said to rise to the dignity of a new Magna Carta."

That it would take one hundred years or more to put these amendments into action remains one of the darkest moments in United States history. A prime mover to enable the force of law to these amendments was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is celebrated as a national holiday on the third Monday of January each year. It is a schizophrenic day since one never knows which establishments will or will not be open. In general, public offices are closed while private businesses continue their daily chores. This holiday was signed into law in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan.

Dr. King has many accolades. He was the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, recipient of the American Liberties Medallion from the American Jewish Committee and is honored in the Gallery of 20th Century martyrs at Westminster Abbey.

Watching the PBS special on Jews in America, one is immediately struck by the connection between Jewish and black citizens for full civil rights. That show portrayed signs from (liberal?) Massachusetts' establishments allowing "No dogs, blacks or Jews." Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, both of Jewish heritage, were assassinated by the Ku Klux Klan, along with James Chaney, who

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Rabbi's Message, cont.

status in Amsterdam. In 1656, we know that he was expelled from that same community, for reasons that remain obscure but probably had to do with his religious and philosophical views. The Jewish community put him into *herem*, a status that forbade any Jew from having contact with him. The play implies that the Dutch governors, by threatening the well-being of the Jewish community, had forced the synagogue to expel Spinoza.

Initially I found myself thinking along two tracks. First, I was reminded of how lucky we are to live in a country where we can speak our minds, live where we choose and earn our living in freedom. The government cannot infringe on those rights. Second, I was also reminded of the dangers inherent in a community's censoring itself. Jewish communities in Europe couldn't afford allowing freedom to their individual members lest the community itself be jeopardized. In America, however, we can speak as individual Jews without being intimidated by that danger. We still have to keep in mind the welfare of the Jewish community, of course, and there are those who would argue that we Jews should present a united front in public although we can disagree quietly among ourselves. Our view about Israel is usually the source of this disagreement. Personally, I prefer a healthy public disagreement to a fearful quiet one.

But there is actually a third danger, as I think about it, and that is that the outside pressures on us can cause us to respond to that aggression by turning it on each other. This is how communities destroy themselves. Because they don't have healthy ways of debating issues, they end up destroying each other and themselves in the process. So I experienced another kind of gratitude, a simple one, and that is for the kind of board meetings we have at our Center. There is no hysteria. There is so much good will and respect for differing views. People speak in responsible and considerate tones even on issues about which they feel passionately. No matter the pressures people experience outside the room, they do not respond by attacking each other. They know that you can't say anything you feel without considering other people's feelings, so they find ways of speaking constructively.

In this election year, I feel gratitude for it all – for living in a country that guarantees our right to free speech, for living in a country where the Jewish community can speak freely, and for living in a congregation which promotes free speech in the interest of the welfare of the community.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis

Purim Spiel

A musical Purim *spiel* will be presented by the SPIELERS, a group of adults and almost adults who will have been practicing the Purim story to the tunes of *Guys and Dolls*. A must-see. Don't miss the one and only performance on Sunday, March 16, at the Purim service.

President's Message, cont.

was black, in 1964. The event occurred while they were promoting voter registration among Mississippi black citizens. This event was the impetus behind the film "Mississippi Burning."

Another interesting vignette in this series was the portrayal of Jewish slave owners and what they must have felt celebrating Passover. The slaves, of course, were relegated to inferior servile status, serving a meal celebrating freedom. I hope that our Passover is a celebration of universal freedom, and not just freedom for "us."

Today, there may be a new group of citizens denied civil rights due to their religious beliefs. One of my friends is a native-born American of Bangladeshi heritage. She is not a practicing Muslim, but has a Muslim name. While traveling with her United States passport, she was interrogated for several hours, missing her flight. Since I have essentially no contact with this community, except for this one individual I know professionally, I can only imagine what is being done in the name of anti-terrorism.

Back to Dr. King. Like all of us, he had feet of clay. Boston University discovered that about 1/3 of his Ph.D. thesis came from uncited sources. They recognized the other 2/3 as original scholarship, and added a letter to his thesis in the archives at Boston University.

Back to the PBS program on Jews in America. Wednesday, January 23 is the last episode. It will have aired by the time this is read. That night I will be attending the first of Charlotte Fels' and Howie Hirsch's classes on the Hebrew in the prayer services. I hope to see you there, if not for the first class, then for the following classes.

Shalom,

Jim Arvesen (917-941-4332, arvesen@att.net)

Blood Drive

The Men's Club is holding our first annual blood drive on February 10th 9:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. We need to get 35 donors to meet our quota. Please call Howie at 908-850-1030 or email him at jcnwjhowie@comcast.net and sign up for one of the open slots for that day. Giving a pint of blood can save three lives and, according to the Talmud, "And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." Think about that. It is like doing Mitzvot wholesale, do one Mitzvah and get credit for 3 Mitzvot.

Shabbat Across America

March 7 is Shabbat across America. It has become our tradition to celebrate this Shabbat with a *Kabbalat Shabbat* service (a short service with no Torah reading), starting at six, followed by a community dinner, starting at seven, followed (sometimes) by wild singing and dancing. We are doing POT LUCK (DAIRY ONLY)

this year and asking for a donation of five dollars (\$5) per family to cover drinks and paper goods. Please contact Rochelle Ostenfeld at 908-537-2339, who will be coordinating this event. Rochelle needs to know how many will be coming and what you will bring—and she will make sure that we don't end up with only green salads. **Let her hear from you by February 21 and send your check so that it gets to her by the last day in February, this year Feb. 29.** Seating, as you all know, is limited in the *simcha* room, so reserve early (after 60 people, no more).

Gourmet Kosher Wine Tasting

On January 10 Jennifer and Rick Rosenblum with the assistance of Karen Finkelstein, Marsha Gross and Debbie Longenecker made the first presentation of Kosher Wine Tasting. We had the opportunity not only to taste and admire four excellent kosher wines (Herzog Merlot, Herzog Sauvignon Blanc, Teal Lake Shiraz, and Jarden Chardonnay), but also learned how to be an “educated wine customer.” We learned about the governing rules of kosher wine making and marketing - and also learned how to be a wine expert at the next formal occasion or even at our own table. Like all good things, wines are to be understood, appreciated, and yes, even consumed thanks to Jennifer, Rick, Karen, Marsha and Debbie, a wine bottle will not only hold wine, but a whole array of enjoyable mysteries! We have several more sessions planned - each with interesting wines, culinary education and good conversation. Mark your calendar for the next event on February 21, 7:30 pm, at the Vintner’s Circle. Any Questions? Call Jennifer. L’Chaim!

Religious School/PTO Events

On February 22, the Religious School students will be leading our Shabbat Service. Parents, bring your children, and kvell with the other parents!

The Confirmation class meets on February 10. There is no school on February 17 (President’s Day.) Coming in March... Our next PTO meeting is March 9. Also on March 9 the Sunday School students will be making hamentaschen. March 16 is the Megillah Reading and Purim Carnival.

*Marsha Gross & Karen Finkelstein
(Education co-Chairs)*

Cooking Club Update

The next Cooking Club will be Feb. 3. Everyone is welcome. Please call Esther Bakonyi or Iris Hirsch so that we know how many people to expect.

SUNDAYS, 12:15 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Feb. 3, April 6. Bring bag lunch. Fee: Share in expenses of ingredients. Children interested in cooking may come with a parent. Contact Iris or Esther at least a week before session(s) you will be attending.

Book Club, March 19, 7:30 p.m.

A special thanks to Stanley and Rona for hosting our Book Club in January. We had a very lively discussion of *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* by Daniel Mendelsohn. We recommend it to all to read. Our March reading will be *Rashi's Daughter* by Maggie Anton. At this time, a location for the meeting has not been decided. Place and directions will be given at a later date. Please contact Risa Smith by March 10 if you plan to come.

Pirke Avot

The Wisdom of the Fathers, taught by Rabbi Ellen Jay Lewis. Lively group discussion always.

*SUNDAY MORNINGS, 10:45 a.m.–noon
Feb. 3, March 2, April 6, May 18 (noon)*

Torah Study Group Changes Meetings

In response to Rabbi Lewis’s sermon on observing Shabbat, the Torah Study Group has decided to meet twice a month. Dates from February through June 2008 are given here; an asterisk precedes the additional Saturday mornings. Remember, discussion begins more or less promptly at 10:30 a.m. New participants are welcome. *Feb. 2, Feb. 16, *March 1, March 22, *April 5, April 26, May 10, *May 24, *June 7, June 21.

Talent Show

The Talent Show is scheduled for March. Be prepared!

Thank you ALL for making our January 6th program a memorable event for everyone. And special thanks to Meryl Lettire, Karen Finkelstein, Hanna Finkelstein, Edythe Herson, Sharon Herson, and last but not least, to Jim Arvesen for helping in the preparation. Remember, a good speaker is only one half of the program - the other half is the audience!

Welcome new members!

Jorge Berkowitz, Rosemont (NJ)
Arlene and Lee Gruber, Long Valley

Donations

In honor of
The Kowski Family, Edward Skoller
January birthdays Helen and John Mattson

In memory of

Rita Hecht,
Rose Fleisher
Rona and Stan Schick
Tillie Ratzman, Linda and Steven Ratzman

Richard Herson,
Rhoda and Joel Pinsky
Jan and Lee Romanczyk
Beth and Josehua Bruner
Rona and Stan Schick
Helen and John Mattson
Charlotte Fels
Teri and Kevin Stanton
Arlene Gordon
Blanche and Marvin Davidson
Diane Margolin and Mike Weiner
Joanne and David Weiss
Gwen and Ed Nagorsky
Laurence Fels, Charlotte Fels
Jack Zemel, Ralph Zemel
In appreciation of Rabbi's and Cantor's inspiring
messages at the time of Richard's death,
Edythe Herson

The Temple wishes a speedy recovery to John Mattson.

Community Programs

JEWISH LIFE

Jewish LIFE presents Curt Leviant, *The Mystery of the Golem*, Thursday, February 21 at 7 p.m. at the Shimon and Sara Birnbaum JCC, Bridgewater. Looking ahead to March...Eva Mekler, author of *The Polish Woman* has been rescheduled for Thursday, March 6 at 7 p.m. at the JCC. Dr. Murray Spiegel, author of *300 Ways to Ask the Four Questions*, will speak on Thursday, March 13, 7 p.m. at Congregation Or Chadash in Flemington (please note new location!). The fee for each program is \$10/Jewish LIFE Member and \$15/Non-Member. Call the JCC at 908-725-6994 to register. Additional details on Jewish LIFE programs are available in the Jewish LIFE brochure posted at www.ssbjcc.org.

Hebrew Chanting Circle

When: Thursday, Feb. 7, 2008, 7:30 to 9:00 PM
Where: Temple Sholom, 594 N. Bridge St, Bridgewater
Fee: \$5.00 donation

You are invited to join a community gathering of chanting using sacred Hebrew phrases that promote the healing of our souls (*Tikkun Ha'Nefesh*) as we strive to contribute to healing our World (*Tikkun Olam*). Hebrew is a sacred vibrational language, and the repetition of a sacred phrase can clear the mind of clutter and create a sense of inner peace and wholeness. In the silence that follows, we can listen for God's voice within us. No prior knowledge of singing, chanting, or Hebrew language is necessary.

This is a picture of the finished Tallitot and the happy Tallitot-Makers. A BIG THANK YOU to all who help with the sewing, ironing, cutting, tying, wrapping, holding... We all had a great time!



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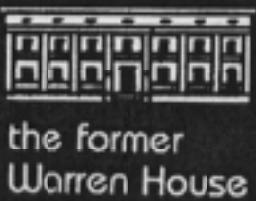
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