

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey



Journal



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www.jcnwj.org

January 2010
Vol. XXXVI, Issue 5

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- *Sunday, Jan. 3
No Sunday School

- *Monday, Jan. 4, 7:30 pm
Board Meeting

- *Tuesday, Jan. 5, 7:00 pm
Adult Hebrew Class

- *Friday, Jan. 8, 7:30 pm
Shabbat Services
Oneg: The May, Robins, Kaplowitz,
and Gutkin families

- *Sunday, Jan. 10
9:30 am Sunday School (K/1)
(Music), Men's Club, and Purim
Spiel Rehearsal
10:30 am Confirmation Class
12:00 pm Ritual Committee
Meeting

- *Tuesday, Jan. 12, 7:00 pm
Adult Hebrew Class

- * Sunday, Jan. 17, 9:30 am
Sunday School and PTO Meeting
10:00 am Sisterhood Meeting
10:45 am Adult Ed.

- *Tuesday, Jan. 19, 7:00 pm
Adult Hebrew Class

- *Friday, Jan. 22, 7:30 pm
Shabbat Services (featuring the
"Rock Shabbat Band")
Oneg: The Hall, Friedlander,
Nagorsky, and Schaffer families

- *Saturday, Jan. 23, 3:00 pm
Purim Spiel Rehearsal

- *Sunday, Jan. 24,
9:30 am Sunday School (K/1)
10:30 am Tu B'shvat Seder

- *Sunday, Jan. 31, 9:30 am
Sunday School

Rabbi's Message

In the old days, a *pushke* sat on the windowsill in the kitchen of every Jewish household. Sometimes it was the blue box of the Jewish National Fund, its funds used in supporting efforts to develop the modern State of Israel. Sometimes, it was just a plain wooden or metal box. What mattered wasn't how it looked; what mattered was the coins that rattled around inside of it.

You may have noticed the new *tzedakah* box hanging on the wall to the right outside the sanctuary doors. It is simple and unobtrusive, in keeping with the character of our congregation. We have talked about putting up a *tzedakah* box for many years. We saw it as a visual reminder of the Jewish value placed on *tzedakah*. The word's root is *tzedek*, meaning not charity but justice. The distinction is an important one. Charity is a voluntary giving out of your own benevolence; *tzedakah* is giving out of religious obligation, regardless of your feeling at that moment.

What is the function of this new *tzedakah* box? You already give *tzedakah* to the Center when you make donations in observance of a *yahrzeit*, in honor of a special occasion or in gratitude for the Center itself. That is the purpose of those envelopes in the wooden boxes in the pews. This new box isn't intended to replace the donations you already make to the Center. It is intended to expand the range of our giving to the community outside our Center.

It has always bothered me that we as a synagogue do not regularly give *tzedakah* to the community. We have at times adopted individual causes; some years ago, we contributed substantial funds when the Jewish Federation was raising money for an ambulance to send to Israel. Our Sunday School children bring *tzedakah* weekly. When the box is full, each class (with the teacher's guidance) votes on where to make its donation. Now we have an opportunity to learn from our children's example – and to set an example for them as well – and donate regularly to causes beyond our own.

You could make the argument that we should be the recipient of our own *tzedakah*. We live in difficult economic times, after all. Despite the many needs in our small beloved congregation, those needs don't obviate the requirement for us to give to others who have less. Even a poor person is not exempt from the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, as this story (clipped ten years ago from a New York Times Metropolitan Diary by Enid Nemy) illustrates:

Nat Helfand was walking past Madison Square Garden recently when a homeless man, holding a cup for contributions, approached him. Mr. Helfand reached into his pocket, retrieved some change and put it into the cup. The homeless man then passed a table with two large jars on it and a man exhorting passers-by to donate. "Just one penny to feed the homeless," he intoned. "One penny can make a difference. Can you find it in your heart to give just one penny?" The homeless man reached into his cup, selected a penny, deposited it in the jar and continued on his way.

Continued on Page 2

President's Message

There are times in the life of a congregation when we have special events that make me feel proud to be a member and a leader of this congregation. One such event took place on the last night of Chanukah. In our neighboring town of Long Valley, where many of our members live, they light a Chanukah menorah at the Splash Restaurant. This year Debbie Fesinstine arranged for our congregation to light the last night's candle. She arranged for her and her daughter, Jill's, Girl Scout Troop to sing some Chanukah songs afterwards. We also had Stephanie Tarlowe (on keyboards and vocals), Grace Weiner (on vocals), Leah Nagorsky (on vocals), Debbie (on acoustic guitar and vocals) and me on congas (no vocals), all led by Cantor Coyot.

We were singing and dancing and having an absolutely wonderful time. There had to be close to 60 people in the restaurant at 4:30 in the afternoon to celebrate Chanukah. My daughter, Allison, mentioned that she was getting a little claustrophobic due to the large number of people in the restaurant, which made me feel very happy. Afterwards, many of us remained for dinner at the restaurant and then proceeded to synagogue for another celebration of Chanukah and Shabbat. The sanctuary was more crowded than it had been in a long while for this service, where we began by inviting families that brought Chanukah's with them to the bima. The glow of the Chanukah lights and the fullness of the sanctuary led to a wonderful service, with Cantor Coyot leading us in some celebratory melodies and some special Chanukah songs as well.

I left the sanctuary that night feeling so good and I was looking forward to all of the activities that we had planned for the weekend -- special Saturday services, Purim spiel practice, a Havdalah service on Saturday evening, Sunday school and all of the activities scheduled for Sunday morning as well as the next practice of our Temple band (which we hope to debut on January 22nd). But Mother Nature had other plans.

We decided to cancel all activities for the weekend. I want you all to know that the reason we cancelled services was to ensure your safety. When making decisions on whether or not to cancel activities at the temple, the overriding goal of the Board is to keep our members safe. If we cancel an event because we are not sure it will be safe to travel by the conclusion of the event, your safety will be the reason. Sometimes I feel a little cautious when making these decisions, but I will always err on the side of caution as opposed to having you drive in conditions that may be unsafe.

May you enjoy the New Year with good health, happiness and the love of your family and friends.

Love,

Howie

Rabbi's Message (cont.)

I have used this story in my classes to illustrate an important Jewish teaching about tzedakah: everyone is obligated to give no matter how much or how little you have.

When might you drop some money in that box? Your own creativity will answer this question. You could drop some money in on your way into Friday night services. One of our b'nai mitzvah tutors requires her students to give tzedakah before beginning the weekly Hebrew tutorial (she teaches that "we pay before we pray"). You can create your own occasions (and then let me know what they are -- we can include your ideas in future issues of this newsletter). The idea is to make giving *tzedakah* a habit.

Once we have some funds, we will have the opportunity to decide where those funds should go. I look forward to those conversations.

Helen Mattson has been working on getting this box since she chaired the Ritual Committee. It was her inspiration to turn to a former member and ask him to create it. We offer our thanks for its design to Ken Weiland, a former member now living in Connecticut. Ken also designed and made the *tzedakah* boxes (the ones that contain donation envelopes) at the end of the sanctuary pews. We hope to find a time when he can join us for a service and we can officially dedicate his gift to us.

Rabbi Israel Salanter once said, "The material needs of my neighbor are my spiritual needs." I can't say it any better than that. May the mitzvah of *tzedakah* bring spiritual warmth to these cold winter days.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis

Education/PTO

December was an exciting month for Sunday School! The Confirmation class went on their annual retreat; we did a Hanukkah Craft project (making decorative flags); and we celebrated Hanukkah with a party, latkes and songs. January is more relaxed. There is no Hebrew School on **January 3rd** (winter break). Confirmation class meets on **January 10th**. **January 17th** is our next PTO meeting, Sisterhood meeting and Adult Ed. And we will enjoy a Tu B'shvat Seder on **January 24th**.

Happy New Year!

Marsha Gross and Karen Finkelstein (Education Co-Chairs)

February Journal Deadline

The deadline for submitting articles, advertisements, and photos to be included in the February Issue is **January 19, 2010**. Please email articles, ideas or news items to Journal Editor, Abby Bauer.

PHOTO ALBUM



Ken and Mercedes Weiland present the new tzedakah box Ken designed for the Jewish Center.
Ken and Howie make the first donations to the newly installed tzedakah box.



Everyone enjoyed the Candle Lighting at Splash Restaurant on the last day of Chanukah.



Hebrew School students participate in a Chanukah Craft, creating Chanukah Flags.

Thank You!

I want to thank the Hebrew School teachers, families and a few other individuals, from the bottom of my heart, for the beautiful Chamilia charm bracelet for my birthday. I am overwhelmed and touched by your warmth, friendship, and love.
Thank you.

~Marsha Gross

Rehearsal for 2010 Purim Spiel

- **Sunday, January 10, 2010 9:30 am – 10:30 am**
- **Saturday, January 23, 2010 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm**
- **Sunday, February 21, 2010 10:00 am – 12:00 pm**
- **Saturday, February 27, 2010 3:00 pm – 5:30 pm**
(dress rehearsal)

It's not too late to join the cast...and the fun!

For more information contact Sharon Herson



Join us for Shabbat Services on
January 22, 2010 at 7:30 pm featuring
the "Rock Shabbat Band"

Coming Soon...

Auditions for the JCNWJ's Annual Talent Show will take place on **Sunday, February 28, 2010**, during the Purim Carnival.

Save the Date

When: February 7, 2010 (Snow date: March 7, 2010) at
12:00 pm

What: B'nai Mitzvah Brunch

For those families who will be celebrating a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in 2011. Details to follow...



Tu Bishvat



JEWISH LIFE

Mark your calendar now for these upcoming Jewish LIFE Programs.

***Michael Rosen**, author of *What Else but Home: Seven Boys and an American Journey between the Projects and Penthouse*, **Tuesday, February 23 at 7 p.m.** (Sponsored by the JCC Festival of Books & Culture)

***Professor Leonard Saxe**, author of *Ten Days Birthright Israel*, **Sunday, March 21 at 10 a.m.**

***Clara Kramer**, author of *Clara's War*. Community-wide Holocaust Observance, **Sunday, April 11 at 7 p.m.** at Temple Beth El, 1489 Hamilton Street, Somerset; 732-873-2325. (Sponsored by the JCC Festival of Books & Culture)

***Jeffrey Zaslow**, author of *The Girls from Ames: A Story of Women and a Forty Year Friendship*, **Tuesday, April 20 at 6:30 p.m.** (Sponsored by the JCC Festival of Books and Culture and Somerset Hadassah)

All programs will be held at the Shimon and Sara Birnbaum JCC, 775 Talamini Road in Bridgewater, with the exception of the Holocaust Observance with Clara Kramer, which will be held at Temple Beth El in Somerset. For program fees and additional details, please go to www.ssbjcc.org. (The Clara Kramer program is free to the community. Please call Temple Beth El directly at 732-873-2325 to register.)

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Contributions

In memory of Laurette Pinn, Belle Shure, Sarah Zeiden, and Joyce Shubs
 ~Helen Mattson

In memory of Mildred Sobine and Esther Heller
 ~Leslie and Murray Heller

In memory of Rita Hecht
 ~Rona and Stan Schick

In memory of Judith Blohm and Anna Wartel
 ~Lauretta Koch

In memory of Molly Finkelstein
 ~Karen, Shelley and Irwin Finkelstein

In memory of Jean Siegel
 ~Rhonda Jordan

In memory of Sally and Jack Zemel
 ~Ralph Zemel

With all best wishes to the congregation
 ~Ken and Mercedes Weiland

In honor of Jordan Andrew Wolf's birth
 ~Rhonda Jordan



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