

inside:

- 2 **Social Action/Social Justice**
 From Gratitude to Growth:
 Reflections on an Interfaith
 Sukkot Event for Shelter Volunteers
- 4 **Interfaith**
 Yom Kippur–Ramadan Interfaith
 Break-Fast
- 5 **Announcements**
- 6 **Calendar**
- 8 **Youth and Family Education**
 A Place for Every Jewish Learner:
 One Family's Journey
- 9 **Community Events**
- Upcoming Limud**
- 10 **BJ Israel Trip, June 11-22, 2008**
- 10 **Donations**
- 12 **Contacts**

Rabbi's Message

RABBI MARCELO R. BRONSTEIN

Al ha-Nissim—For the Miracles

It was in the days of Mattathias, son of Johanan, the Hasmonean high priest, and his sons, when the wicked Greek government rose up against his people Israel to force them to forsake their Torah and to transgress the laws of his will. You in your abundant mercy didst stand up for them in their time of travail, defended their cause, judged their suit, and avenged their wrong. You did deliver the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked ones into the hands of the righteous, and the insolent ones into the hands of those occupied with your Torah. You did make for yourself a great and holy name in your universe. For the people Israel you did create a great deliverance and relief as at this day. Then Your children came to the holy of holies of Your house, cleansed Your Temple and purified Your sanctuary. They kindled lights in the courtyards of Your sanctuary and established these eight days of Hanukkah to give thanks and praise to Your great name.

—Version of the prayer *Al ha-Nissim*, by Rav Amram Gaon, Ninth Century

We thank You for the miracles, the redemptions, the mighty deeds and the victorious battles that You achieved for our fathers in those days at this season.

We say this prayer on Hanukkah during the *Amidah* and in the *Birkat ha-Mazon*. It is an expression of thanksgiving for the miracle that was given to us during the times of Matitiah.

When we light the Hanukkah candles we recite the *HaNerot Halalu*, saying the following:

These lights we kindle upon the miracles and wonders, the salvations, and the battles which You performed for our forefathers in those days at this season, through your holy priest. During all eight days of Hanukkah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them, but to look at them, in order to express thanks and praise to Your great name, for Your miracles, Your wonders and Your salvation.

These two prayers are clearly about thanksgiving, yet they give us two completely different ways to approach the holy days of Hanukkah. In the first prayer, we have an historical account that describes how we could have been destroyed, but were not, and how David, yet again, won against Goliath. That in itself is a miracle. In the second prayer we have a clear emphasis on the miracle of the lights, on the oil that was supposed to burn only for one day but lasted eight. In this prayer, we celebrate the supernatural characteristic of the miracle, that being the reason why we cannot touch the candles. We pray to remember the miracle of the oil and we declare to the world that God intervened.

Noam Zion, in his essay *Do I Really Believe in Miracles (A Different Light)*, expresses that each December when Hanukkah arrives, he is not willing to give up his scientific approach to reality and place his belief in miracles. He explains that the stress that is given to the miracle of the oil grew in importance over the years, due to the modern campaign of placing big menorot in public gathering spaces:

(continued on page 10)

From Gratitude to Growth Reflections on an Interfaith Sukkot Event for Shelter Volunteers

We gathered on a glorious September Sunday for our annual Sukkot celebration—more than 60 of us, Jewish and Christian volunteers from three neighboring congregations who share the work of the BJ/SPSA Homeless Shelter.

We chose this holiday because Jews are commanded to dwell in a sukkah, which means “shelter.” Also, we are commanded to rejoice—and we had so much to celebrate!

Each year we inched our way forward, steadily increasing the number of shelter volunteers. We involved children, teenagers, families and assorted groups from BJ and beyond in preparing meals for our shelter guests. We invited our volunteers to a series of home-based Shabbat lunches to build a greater sense of belonging and community. Finally, with support from our two church partners, we added a fifth night when we could offer shelter to our homeless guests.

Our Sukkot celebration also helped us bridge the congregational and religious divide among our volunteers. “The shelter is where interfaith—that worthy goal to which so many congregations aspire—really happens,” co-chair Jim Melchiorre noted. That’s where our various congregants have a chance to work together, get to know one another better, and find common ground for social action in our shared values. And without the collaboration of SPSA and WPPC, we would have neither the space nor the volunteers to keep our shelter open five days a week all year round.



Most of all, Sukkot is a harvest festival of thanksgiving and we wanted to thank the many people who generously offer their time, their kindness and the labor of their hands to make our shelter program possible. They have taken to heart Abraham Joshua Heschel’s call for us to “pray with our feet” by

putting our ideals in action. And, as Laurie Graff, a veteran volunteer put it, “It’s impossible to volunteer at a shelter without being grateful you have a home.”

As I waited to greet everyone in the sukkah, I thought about each of the changes we made over the years. Though each

change was guided by the desire to improve the shelter, they all entailed growing pains. Each step took extensive preparation, experimentation, flexibility, adjustment, time and hard work to get to where we are now. We are proud of all we have accomplished but we also see that there is more to do.

This year, as BJ’s new Social Action Coordinator Channa Camins, Jim Melchiorre and I were planning our Sukkot event, we knew we had to start down the bumpy road toward still another change.

The advocacy idea had been bubbling for some time, spurred by BJ’s Panim el Panim initiative. While we are a service program, we wanted to do something to end or at least reduce homelessness in our city. Now, as part of BJ’s social action program, we are joining with a community organization called Manhattan Together to advocate for more affordable housing for low-income citizens.

At the same time, we were exploring another approach to advocacy. Many of our shelter guests have shown great progress and made it out of the shelter system. What made it possible for some guests to grow and regain control of their lives? What could we do during our interactions with our shelter guests to increase their sense of empowerment and responsibility? In the midst of these discussions, we faced a serious challenge over the summer. Some items had been stolen and our shelter guests came under suspicion. Also, reports had come to us about shelter guests who had broken various rules. We were determined to address these problems while maintaining our commitment to our basic approach. As Laurie Graff put it, “At BJ, the homeless who come to the shelter are called and considered guests. The goal for the volunteers is to make their stay comfortable and dignified, treating them as you would a guest in your home.” That is an expression of our deepest values.

Could we find a way to ensure safety, security and order within an atmosphere of respect? To get some advice, we contacted one of our former shelter guests, who was making strides toward independence, and consulted with professionals at the Partnership for the Homeless.

It was against this background that we planned the program for our Sukkot event. Now we would see if it would succeed.

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As we walked from the sukkah at SPSA to our lunch in the BJ sanctuary, I thought about what we had just learned. Our teachers, Esther Lederman, a first-year Marshall T. Meyer Rabbinic Fellow at BJ; Rev. James “K” Karpen of SPSA; and Rev.

Robert “Bob” Brashear of West Park Presbyterian Church (WPPC) had gotten it just right. The essence of what we do as shelter volunteers is to respond to our most vulnerable citizens by offering protection and hospitality. In the process, we confront our own fragility and, more often than not, discover our own humanity and gratitude. Maybe that’s why Sukkot insists that we be joyous despite life’s uncertainties.

After lunch, Jim Melchiorre introduced our special speaker, Shirl Neufeld. When she stepped up to the podium, it was clear that some of our volunteers recognized her. Only months before, she had been a guest at our shelter. Shirl was a living example for her campaign to break the stereotype of homeless people. A college graduate, she was well-dressed and articulate, was working again and had written an article for the Web entitled “The New Hidden Faces of Homelessness: The Educated Professional.”

She spoke about the factors that had helped her take these steps back to the mainstream—her personal qualities of faith and determination, and the support she received from others. She expressed how immensely grateful she was to our volunteers for their encouragement and support. And she related her experiences of self-discovery, regaining respectability and empowerment, especially how empowering it had been to be treated with the respect she received at our shelter. Then Shirl called on four volunteers she had met and gotten to know during her months with us. She asked them to talk about their perspective on the shelter and why they volunteer. Amazingly, each one told not about what they give but what they get, a gratitude that comes so often from those involved with our homeless shelter.

Shirl’s presentation led into our training on the theme: “Face to Face: Creating Dignity and Responsibility Through Our Interactions in the Shelter.”

We introduced some new check-in procedures to be used with our guests before starting the evening meal. By having everyone gather around the table, we hoped to create a more family-like atmosphere. By asking guests and volunteers to introduce themselves by name, we hoped to increase each person’s visibility as an individual worthy of respect. By reviewing some basic rules, we hoped to remind everyone about our expectations and to emphasize each person’s role in maintaining an atmosphere of trust and responsibility.

Now our volunteers practiced with each other using our suggested script and worksheet. We expected this part of the program to be a challenge and we got valuable feedback from volunteers to improve our new check-in procedures.

When Channa, Jim and I spoke afterwards, we weren’t sure if our plans would be effective. Then some comments began coming in.

Jim Posner, a long-time volunteer, said “I thought it was particularly good to get first-hand reactions from a guest. And the way she acknowledged a few of the volunteers paved the way for the training. I thought having a script to express our shared expectations was very productive.”

Catherine Garvey, a more recent regular, said, “It was very interesting to hear a former guest speak. I was so moved by how she explained her efforts to move beyond her current situation, not with self-pity but with determination and a sense of appreciation for those who have helped her.”

A few days later, I heard from Kate Baum, a WPPC member who began volunteering last year: “We did a family-style dinner tonight and it was lovely. All the volunteers joined the guests at the table. At one point we just stopped and talked about the rules without going through the list. And the women responded very well. So I took something away from our meeting that was very useful tonight. I think that is more like being at home rather than doing a buffet table. That is really hospitality—not just providing the food but feeling like a family.”

So there is hope. Call it social action, social justice or *tikkun olam*, I think it happens best when people can build community. We had a chance to do that for our shelter family by meeting each other face-to-face; learning a thing or two about each other’s faiths; getting some well-deserved pats on the back; sharing a meal and debating the solutions to some very real problems. With stronger bonds between us, we can go together on the path toward making this a better world, one bump at a time. ■

—Anne Millman

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Yom Kippur-Ramadan Interfaith Break-Fast

At a place in South Africa called Tolstoy Farm, built by Mohandas Gandhi in 1910, Gandhi encouraged the farm's residents—Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Zoroastrians—to celebrate their diversity. In his interfaith experiment, the children were taught the holy texts of their own traditions, and residents provided food for one another after their fast days. Gandhi called this project “among the sweetest reminiscences of Tolstoy Farm.”*

Rabbi Marc Gopin writes in his brilliant book *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*:

[The Ramadan fast] is transformed, in Gandhi's hands, into a moment of interreligious discovery of immense power that leads the participants to nonviolence. Gandhi's concern was to provide a model for religious observance that simultaneously creates tolerance. There are very few models that have been generated by the world's religions that are simultaneously authentic to a religious tradition and... accepting of other traditions.... Gandhi's concept of lived religiosity that is both authentic and pluralistic needs to be examined as a model for contemporary societies that mix people of many faiths.... The key is not the blurring of religious distinctions but the peacemaking quality that is inherent in enabling someone else to practice her religion.**

The air itself was electric with joy, energy, and the pure relief of laying down the burden of all that divides us.”

—Jenny Golub

Inspired by Gandhi's example, in 2005 BJ joined with ASMA Society (the American Society for Muslim Advancement) and Women in Islam to break our Yom Kippur and Ramadan fasts together, at a beautiful vegetarian dinner prepared and hosted by our friends at the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew (SPSA). It was the first time in thirty-three years that the two holidays had coincided, and we broke our fasts together at SPSA in 2006 and 2007, as well. At the first two events, Jewish

volunteers brought festive Ramadan dishes and donated dates for the Muslims' traditional pre-dinner fast-breaking, and Muslims brought honey cake, hallah, and apples and honey. (In 2007, with much less time for organizing the event, we only asked some BJ guests to donate dates.)

As BJ member Stef Krieger commented, “I've never seen anything so close to what the world will be like when Mashiach [the Messiah] will be here.” Truly, to enter the SPSA social hall

was to step into a world of both physical and spiritual beauty. In a room full of softly lit tables were 150 Jews, Muslims, and Christians talking, laughing, forging friendships, and sharing and contributing to each other's celebrations. SPSA musicians provided cheerful background music, and children from the church had made place mats with loving messages and pictures. The air itself was electric with joy, energy, and the pure relief of laying down the burden of all that divides us.

SPSA volunteers put in hours of hard work to prepare this dinner, which they generously served free of charge. A visit to the social hall on the afternoon of Yom Kippur found many volunteers, including Rev. K Karpen and his family, chopping vegetables, cooking, and setting up tables. K's response to a grateful “God bless you” was a hearty “Fun, fun!” This was the typical response of everyone from the church, which its clergy describe as “a can-do congregation.” The event literally would not have been possible without them—without their opening their home, their arms, their hearts, and their resources so that Jews, Muslims, and Christians had a place to sit together in peace.

Gratifyingly, countering the media's usual focus on strife, the event received news coverage both last year and this year. In 2006, the PBS program *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* did a short report on the break-fast. And this year, NY1 News covered the event. You can read its report at www.ny1.com (search the archives for “interfaith”).

From the huge turnout on the part of Jews, Muslims, and Christians, it's clear that we have an enormous thirst to know each other better. In the words of a Turkish-American friend of mine when I told her about last year's event, “Oh, it makes me so happy. It's peace. It's peace!” As Marcelo has said, *this* is our response to September 11—rather than “withdrawing into our own corners,” we have chosen to come together with trust, sharing, and hope. So, although Yom Kippur and Ramadan will not coincide for another thirty-three years, the BJ Interfaith Committee will be in touch with our Christian and Muslim friends about organizing a periodic pot-luck dinner. And check www.bj.org for more exciting events sponsored by the Interfaith Committee. We hope to see you there! ■

—Jenny Golub

* Surendra Bhana, “The Tolstoy Farm: Gandhi's Experiment in ‘Cooperative Commonwealth,’ ” *The South African Historical Journal*, Nov. 1975 (www.tolstoyfarm.com).

** Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 23.

Mazal Tov

To the following members and their families on their b'nai mitzvah (through November):

Max Kantor	Avi Raber
Arianna Schein Futerfas	Shay Tsfofi
Drew Adler	Joseph Brill
Sydney Goldberger	Margo Motulsky
Noah Offitzer	

To the following members and their families (through November 2):

Stanley Frankel and Dana Norris on their recent wedding.

Martin Kornstein and Lisa Glass on their recent wedding.

Richard and Sharri Posen on the marriage of their daughter Danielle to Alexander Mindlin.

Gabrielle and Nadav Hazan on the birth of their daughter, Daniella Eden.

Alon, Svetlana and Rachel Bochman on the birth of their daughter and sister, Emma Sharon.

Helen Hanan on the birth of her grandson, Julian Charles Joseloff.

Leonard and Lois Sharzer on the birth of their grandson, Dante Benjamin Gutrecht, son of Jessica Sharzer and Paul Gutrecht.

Yael Hammerman and Josh Rabin on their recent engagement.

Gustavo Bruckner and Bena and Noam Medjuk-Bruckner on the birth of their daughter and sister.

Stacy Bolton and James and Eliza Stulman and Stephen Stulman on the birth of their daughter, sister and granddaughter, Rachel Bolton Stulman.

Billy Macklowe and Julie Lerner Macklowe, and Harry and Linda Macklowe on the birth of their daughter and granddaughter, Zoe Lerner Macklowe.

Condolences *(through November 2)*

The community of B'nai Jeshurun extends sincere condolences to the following members and their families:

Bob Gruenspecht on the death of his beloved father, Martin Gruenspecht.

Diego, Sofia and Lucio Vainesman, and Pam Prichett on the death of Diego's beloved mother, Estela Vainesman.

Sandy and Ron Ashendorf on the death of Sandy's beloved father, Ira H. Wexner.

Robert Mandel and Lois Alexander on the death of Rob's beloved mother, Magda Davidman.

Terry Marx, Stephen Arpadi and their children, Charlotte and Adina, on the death of Terry's beloved father, Hank Marx.



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
<p>2</p> <p> • 4:00 PM – 5th Grade B'nai Mitzvah Family Learning Program (SEE P.9)</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4 HANUKKAH: 1ST NIGHT</p> <p> • 4:00 PM – Family Pre-Hanukkah Program, 88th St. • 8:00 PM – Tze'irim Chanukkah Chananigan at The Parlour, 86th St. between Broadway and West End Ave. (SEE P.9)</p>	<p>5 HANUKKAH: 2ND NIGHT</p>	<p>6 HANUKKAH: 3RD NIGHT</p> <p> • 5:00 PM – Hey Mitzvah, 88th St.</p>
<p>9 HANUKKAH: 6TH NIGHT</p> <p>• Bar Mitzvah – Jonathan Pauker</p>	<p>10 ROSH HODESH TEVET HANUKKAH: 7TH NIGHT</p> <p>• 6:15 PM – Women's Rosh Hodesh Group, 86th St. Chapel (SEE P.9) • 7:00 PM – Environmental Action Hevra Expo, "Hanukkah: A Festival of Eternal Lights," 88th St.</p>	<p>11 HANUKKAH: 8TH NIGHT</p> <p> • 5:00 PM – Families Cooking for the Shelter, 88th St. Frankel Hall • 7:00 PM – Hanukkah Meditation, Makom (JCC, Amsterdam Ave. at 77th St.)</p>	<p>12</p>	<p>13</p> <p> • 5:00 PM – Gimmitz, 88th St.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>17</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19</p> <p>• 7:00 PM – Tze'irim Limud Salon (SEE P.9)</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>23</p>	<p>24 BJHS CLOSED FOR WINTER BREAK</p>	<p>25 BJ OFFICE CLOSED</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27 BJHS CLOSED FOR WINTER BREAK</p>
<p>30</p>	<p>31 BJHS CLOSED FOR WINTER BREAK</p>			

SERVICE TIMES

Morning Minyan (88th Street):

• Monday-Friday 7:30 AM. • Sunday & National Holidays 9:30 AM

Kabbalat Shabbat:

• 5:45 PM 88th St. Sanctuary • 7:15 PM 88th Street Sanctuary
December 21, 28: 6:30 PM 88th St. Sanctuary (no late service on those dates)
• Additional Service December 28: Contemplative Shabbat Service 5:45 PM 86th St. Sanctuary

Shabbat Morning:

• 9:30 AM 86th Street • Children's Services 10:45 AM 86th Street Chapel and Parlor
• Additional Services December 1, 15: Junior Congregation 10:30 AM 86th Street Social Hall

SDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		<p>1 • 9:30 AM – Shabbat Morning Services, 86th St. • 10:30 AM – Junior Congregation, 86th St. Social Hall • 10:45 AM – Children's Services, 86th St. Chapel and Parlor • Bat Mitzvah – Naomi Hendel • 3:45 PM – Minha • Bar Mitzvah – Benjamin Manning • 4:00 PM – Shabbat: A Sanctuary in Time, 86th St. Social Hall</p>
<p>RD NIGHT Hey Mispaha,</p>	<p>7 HANUKKAH: 4TH NIGHT • 5:45 PM – Kabbalat Shabbat Service, 88th St. • Following 5:45 PM Service – Gan HS Family Dinner, 86th St. Social Hall • 7:15 PM – Kabbalat Shabbat Service, 88th St. • Following 7:15 PM Service – Oneg Shabbat, 88th St. (SEE P.9)</p>	<p>8 HANUKKAH: 5TH NIGHT • 9:30 AM – Shabbat Morning Services, 86th St. • 10:45 AM – Children's Services, 86th St. • Bar Mitzvah – Jeremy Staub • Following Services – Community Kiddush, 86th St. Social Hall • 4:15 PM – Minha, 88th St. • Bat Mitzvah – Maya Citron •  5:00 PM – Hanukkah PJs & Hadvalah, 86th St. Social Hall • 7:00 PM – Sulha Peace Project presentation and concert with Gabriel Meyer, 88th St.</p>
<p>Gimmel Mispaha,</p>	<p>14 • 10:30 AM – Parent/Child Play Group, 88th St. Frankel Hall • 5:45 PM – Kabbalat Shabbat Service, 88th St. • Following 5:45 PM Service – Community Shabbat Dinner, 88th St. Frankel Hall (SEE P.9) • 7:15 PM – Kabbalat Shabbat Service, 88th St.</p>	<p>15 • 9:30 AM – Shabbat Morning Services, 86th St. • 10:30 AM – Junior Congregation, 86th St. Social Hall • 10:45 AM – Children's Services, 86th St.</p>
	<p>21 • 6:30 PM – Kabbalat Shabbat Service, 88th St. (NOTE: ONLY ONE SERVICE.)</p>	<p>22 • 9:30 AM – Shabbat Morning Services, 86th St. • 10:45 AM – Children's Services, 86th St.</p>
<p>BREAK</p>	<p>28 • 5:45 PM – Contemplative Shabbat Service and Potluck Dinner, 86th St. • 6:30 PM – Kabbalat Shabbat Service, 88th St.</p>	<p>29 • 9:30 AM – Shabbat Morning Services, 86th St. • 10:45 AM – Children's Services, 86th St.</p>

ADULT CLASSES

Please see the BJ website, www.bj.org, for more information and how to register.

Monday

- Introduction to Judaism 7-9 PM (through May; no class December 31)

Tuesday

- The Book of Genesis 8:10-9: AM (through May)

- Learning The Liturgy: Feeling At Home With The Siddur 7-8:30 PM (remaining classes December 4, 11, 18)

Wednesday

- Abraham Joshua Heschel's Heavenly Torah 6:30-8 PM (remaining class December 5)

- Engendering Judaism: What Is At Stake? 12:15-1:15 PM (remaining classes December 5, January 9, February 6, March 5, April 2)

Thursday

- Parashat HaShavu'a: Study of the Weekly Torah Portion 7-9 PM (through May)

YOUTH CLASSES

Monday

- 4-5:30 PM, Kindergarten and First grade
- 4-6 PM, Second through Sixth grade

Thursday

- 4-5:30 PM, Kindergarten and First grade
- 4-6 PM, Second through Seventh grade

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Sunday-Thursday

- BJ/SPSA Homeless Shelter 7 PM

Thursday

- Judith Bernstein Lunch Program 12 PM



indicates Family Life and Hebrew School events

Candlelighting Times	Parashat HaShavu'a	Havdalah Times
November 30 4:11 PM	December 1 Vayeshev	December 1 5:14 PM
December 7 4:10PM	December 8 Miketz	December 8 5:13 PM
December 14 4:11 PM	December 15 Vayigash	December 15 5:14 PM
December 21 4:13 PM	December 22 Vayehi	December 22 5:17 PM
December 28 4:17 PM	December 29 Shemot	December 29 5:21 PM

A Place for Every Jewish Learner: One Family's Journey

Three years ago, my husband, James, and I learned that our son, Adam, was dyslexic. At the time, he was in 1st Grade at the Bank Street School for Children. The learning specialist there, Lisa Slater, had pinpointed early on his difficulty with sound/symbol recognition, one of the cornerstones of learning to read. We had him evaluated by a neuro-psychologist, who corroborated Lisa's earlier findings and recommended that we move him to a school such as Churchill or Gateway, for children with learning disabilities. The fall of 2004 was spent touring schools, filling out applications and taking Adam on interviews. After the initial shock of finding out that he was going to go to another school, Adam handled the situation like a champ, sensing that he was going to get the help he needed. When he got into Churchill, we were jubilant. It was more than winning the lottery, more than getting into Harvard—our bright, beloved boy was no longer going to have sit in a room with his peers and feel stupid because it was so terribly difficult for him to learn how to read. He was going to be in a place with children with average to above average I.Q.'s who shared his difficulties.

Up until then, Adam had attended the BJ Hebrew School, going to classes at Heschel after school with his older sister, Tess. I began to think about what Adam's first year at Churchill would look like. On a good day, the commute in both directions would be one and a half to two hours. And then to ask him to sit in a classroom again for another two hours, two afternoons a week, learning a second language with an entirely different alphabet? It seemed like a tall order. I asked Meryl Schwartz, the Churchill Elementary School principal, for her advice. Because of the small class sizes, and the very focused instruction, being in a classroom at Churchill was like being under a microscope, she explained. At the end of the day, the kids were tired and she added, "For many of them English IS like a second language." She went on to say that we should decide what was best for our family and that many Churchill children successfully attended Hebrew Schools all over the city and were Bar and Bat Mitzvah'd.

After much soul-searching and several conversations with Adam himself, we decided not to enroll him in Hebrew School that year, wanting to give the best of chance of success at his new school. He adapted beautifully, a great testament both to him and the extraordinary staff. For many months, I couldn't set foot in the building without getting a lump in my throat, because I was so immensely grateful that he was there.

Towards the end of his second year at Churchill, I began to think about Hebrew School again, after we'd received notice in the mail from BJ about Adam's Bar Mitzvah in 2010. I remember receiving a similar letter for my older daughter, Tess,

announcing that very first Bar/Bat Mitzvah meeting for parents. This time I read the letter with a heavy heart, knowing that there was no place for Adam in the Hebrew School in its present structure. I knew how very hard it would be for him to go twice a week and sit in a classroom with children who could read and write fluently. Unlike Tess, he would not have the same warm, social network of Hebrew School friends whose Bar and Bat Mitzvahs he would attend. Once again, he would feel different and separate, in the very place that was supposed to feel most inclusive, most welcoming.

It all came to a head at the first Bar and Bat Mitzvah meeting for Adam where I found myself standing up in a room full of people clumsily trying to reach out to the other parents of children with learning disabilities. Several parents came up to me after the meeting and I began to learn what their struggles were, and how they had approached the same problem. It wasn't easy being learning disabled and Jewish, or being the parents of a Jewish, learning disabled child. After all we are the people of the book, over-represented in all the professions that rely on academic learning. Although our ancient forebears tilled the soil and worked with their hands, as a people we place a very high value on intellectual achievement. I know this intimately, as I am a writer by profession whose life has been shaped by my love of books. I am also the daughter of a South African doctor, whose Lithuanian immigrant parents did whatever they could to ensure that he attend medical school.

I met privately with Rabbi Felicia Sol and Hollis Gauss, BJ's Director of Education, and told them about my struggle to find the right Jewish learning experience for Adam, and how much I wanted him to have what his sister had. They heard what I had to say and I began to feel that a big burden was lifting. Hollis mentioned Matan, a not-for-profit organization that enables Jewish schools and communities to include children with special needs in their educational programs. In the past, Matan had worked in an advisory capacity at the Hebrew School. Over the next few weeks and months, Hollis explored setting up a Matan class at BJ, made up of children like Adam who had language-related learning disabilities. In partnership with Fran Pearlman, BJ's consultant from Matan, Hollis started the search for a teacher who would be trained both in Hebrew and special education. With a lot of energy and determination, the first BJ Matan class was created with six children and a wonderful young Israeli teacher at the helm.

They meet once a week on Mondays, for two hours, and the class is specifically designed to address their needs. Adam has sat in a succah, touched the Torah with a yad, and made new friends. Over time, he will learn the skills he needs to be a Bar Mitzvah. Right now I feel extraordinarily blessed that a small

(continued on page 9)

One Family's Journey (continued from page 8)

miracle has happened here, that my son is part of a Hebrew School community just like his sister, and like his mother, who attended cheder (no less than three afternoons a week!) in a tiny South African town many years ago. ■

—Anne Landsman, BJ member and author. Her second novel, *The Rowing Lesson* (Soho Press), has just been published.

• Chanukkah Chananigan at The Parlour (Tze'irim 20s/30s)

Tuesday, December 4 • 8:00-10:00PM • The Parlour, 86th Street between Broadway and West End Ave. Open bar featuring wine, beer, soda and special Hanukkah treats. Bring your friends, order your "gin and tonicah" and celebrate Hanukkah at Tze'irim's favorite local hangout. Cost: \$20.

• Friday Night Off-Broadway: Shabbat at BJ

Friday, December 7 • Following the 7:15PM service • 88th Street Sanctuary. Gather with old and new friends as we celebrate Hanukkah and Shabbat together! The BJ Shabbat Onegs are designed to create a welcoming community for all, taking us on a journey through the powerful beauty of Shabbat with traditional rituals, live music, joyous dancing, singing and food. As the Sanctuary fills with the sounds of Shabbat and Hanukkah melodies, played by Basya Schechter with the

• Learning The Liturgy: Feeling At Home With The Siddur Rabbi Felicia L. Sol

4 Tuesdays (remaining classes, December 4, 11, 18) • 7:00-8:30PM • 88th Street Sanctuary • Free; registration not required. This class will explore the basic history of the compilation of the siddur, the structure of the liturgy and the rhythm of our davening in order to help students unlock a deeper prayer experience because they will feel more at home with the siddur and its liturgy. The class will focus primarily on the Shabbat liturgy. The two middle classes will take place during Hanukkah and the Hanukkah will be lit in class.

• Abraham Joshua Heschel's Heavenly Torah

Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon
7 Wednesdays (remaining class December 5) • 6:30-8:00PM • 88th Street Frankel Hall • Free; registration required. We resume our study of Rabbi Heschel's gigantic work on rabbinic thought in observance of his centennial year. *Heavenly Torah*, recently translated into English, explores the polarity in Judaism between transcendence and immanence, and between mysticism and rationalism. Heschel also invites us to look at contemporary issues through the lens of classical rabbinic discussions. Please bring the book to class (available in paperback); no photocopies will be distributed. New participants are welcome.

• 5th Grade B'nai Mitzvah Family Learning Program

Sunday, December 2 • 4:00-6:00PM • Join Rabbi Roly Matalon, Ivy Schreiber, and other 5th grade B'nai Mitzvah children and their parents for an afternoon of learning. For more information, please contact Ivy at ischreiber@bj.org or x225.

popular band Pharaoh's Daughter, an intimate and sacred time and space is created.

• Community Shabbat Dinner

Friday, December 14 • Following the 5:45PM service • 88th Street Frankel Hall. Please join the B'nai Jeshurun community for the first Community Shabbat Dinner of the year. To sign up, please visit www.bj.org or contact Yael at x255.

• Tze'irim Limud Salon: When Is Everyday Life Like Torah?

Wednesday, December 19 • 7:00PM. This salon will focus on several methods of interpreting Judaism's sacred texts. Then we will discuss ways of applying them to everyday activities, feelings, and thoughts. Please RSVP to tzlimud@yahoo.com for event location.

• A MONTHLY LUNCHTIME ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION Engendering Judaism: What Is At Stake?

Rabbi Felicia L. Sol
6 Wednesdays (remaining classes December 5, January 9, February 6, March 5, April 2) • 12:15-1:15PM • BJ Office • Free; registration required. Meet monthly to discuss Dr. Rachel Adler's book *Engendering Judaism*, which raises the deep questions of what it means to sustain and create a Judaism that is alive, relevant and inclusive for both men and women, while acknowledging the complicated reality of the "tradition" which is patriarchal at its essence and yet what we've received over thousands of years. Full participation in the discussion will require purchasing the book and reading the chapters in advance of the discussion.

• Rosh Hodesh Women's Group for Tevet

Facilitated by Rabbi Felicia L. Sol and Marshall T. Meyer Fellow Chen Ben Or Tsfofi

Monday, December 10 • 6:15PM • 86th Street Chapel • Free; registration not required. Each new month on the Hebrew calendar, we will have an opportunity to study, discuss, celebrate and pray together on this holiday traditionally associated with women. Please bring a dairy/vegetarian kosher snack to share. In honor of Hanukkah and the lighting of our new solar-powered Ner Tamid, at 7:15PM we will join with BJ's Environmental Action Hevra at 88th Street for "Hanukkah: A Festival of Eternal Lights." The festival will feature an environmental expo with information and vendor booths focused on sustainable/renewable energy, candlelighting, and dedication of the Ner Tamid.

Youth and Family Education

Community Events

Upcoming Limud

Please see the BJ website, www.bj.org, for more information and how to register.

BJ Israel Trip, June 11-22, 2008: Celebrating Israel at 60 through Social Action and Social Justice

Join Rabbi Felicia Sol and members of the BJ community as we celebrate Israel at 60! This trip will **explore** the social justice issues in Israel associated with poverty, minority populations, the divide between the religious and secular, the environment, and more! Come **discover** what justice means, meet the people who pursue these goals, hear the voices in the field and engage in both study and direct service opportunities in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Make the commitment to help Israel reach its dream in the next 60 years and beyond! ■

**For registration materials,
please contact Ivy Schreiber at
212-787-7600, ext. 225 or
ischreiber@bj.org.**

Rabbi's Message RABBI MARCELO R. BRONSTEIN (continued from page 1)

airports, plazas, boulevards, entrances of buildings, train stations, restaurants, etc.

The issue of miracles is a very complex one. If performing a miracle is so easy, then each Shabbat let God bring from the death the many tzadikim who are buried when we say the *mechayeh ha-metim*—*you who resuscitates the dead*. If I believe the literal meaning of this prayer to be true, my faith is destroyed every Shabbat. We do not have clear responses to everything in the tradition; there is an ocean of openness and ambiguity.

These two prayers are presented as different glasses through which we see reality. Noam Zion suggests that the Al ha-Nissim "...ignores the miracle of the oil and speaks of a general phenomenon possible in every generation whereby God helps human beings to bring about miraculous rescues from historical oppressors... The miracle is 'natural' within the realm

of historical possibility, yet inconceivable and unattainable by oppressed peoples who don't believe in its possibility." (*A Different Light*, p. 190).

This is exactly the point. It is a **miracle** to imagine that reality could be different when we are completely dominated by a situation that is oppressive. It is inconceivable to visualize that things could be different. Yet, the ability to stretch the imagination and revisit discarded thoughts because they seemed outrageous or crazy, or to pursue dreams that we once believed were not for us—that is a miracle. When we allow ourselves the courage to imagine, we begin a journey and a path where the impossible ceases to be an impediment and becomes a challenge to overcome.

Hanukkah is a rededication to the belief that the impossible is not so out of reach; it is a rededication to dream, to bring light to our lives and to the world. ■

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(through October 28)

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Flower Fund

Marcia Annenberg in memory of her beloved mother, Francis Annenberg
Glenn and Judy Marlowe in gratitude to our rabbis, Ari and the musicians for the beautiful services at JALC

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Lana Kalickstein in honor of Guy Austrian and Rabbi Jill Jacobs on their marriage, in honor of Elissa Meth's engagement and Sarah Revesz's Bat Mitzvah
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Glenn and Judy Marlowe in honor of Tamar Baumgold, recent great-grandmother
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Accounts Payable.....227
 Accounts Receivable237
 Adult Education Information233
 Bar/Bat Mitzvah223
 Bikkur Holim.....308
 BJ Reads.....391
 Conversion.....264
 Daily Minyan232
 Deaf & Hard of Hearing
 e-mail: CLAZK@AOL.COM
 phone: 212-628-7061
 Development
 & Donation Information.....242

88th Street Rental.....223
 Family Activities: Hotline.....318
 Hakhnasat Orhim.....351
 Havurot222
 Hevra Kadisha212-496-0616
 Homeless Shelter.....212-339-4250
 Interfaith Committee 379
 Kiddush Scheduling255
 Kol Jeshurun.....254
 Ledor Vador224
 Lunch Program.....338
 Membership Information.....224
 Ralph Bunche School Partnership...301
 Shabbat B'Yahad Committee233

Social Action259
 Telephone Language Companion
 212-721-9037
 Teen Programming.....253
 Torah/Haftarah Reading.....232
 Ushering305
 Volunteer Information.....255
 Youth & Family Education.....244

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