

## Can We Go Back Home? RABBI J. ROLANDO MATALON

“Going back to 89th Street will give us the home that we have earned and that we deserve as a community.”

### Teen Service Learning Trip to New Orleans



PHOTO: IVY SCHREIBER

From left: Sam Brunswick, Yoni Nachmany, Rachel Kline. See pages 12-13 for more photos of the trip.

As is already widely known among our congregation, The Heschel School's building on 89th Street is up for sale. In this article I want to share some of the history of that building and to reemphasize why it is so important for BJ to acquire it.

In 1981, together with educators and others from a broad spectrum of the Jewish community, Peter Geffen (BJ member and founder of Kivvunim) worked to project a vision for a pluralistic Jewish school. At that time B'nai Jeshurun, once vibrant and prominent, was at the end of a sad and significant decline and was looking to sell its Community House on 89th Street. In the fall of 1983, The Abraham Heschel School acquired the building and opened its doors to 28 students. Today this remarkable and unique school has more than 800 students in nursery through grade 12, and it spans three buildings. The Heschel School's board has recently announced their decision to consolidate the entire school in one location, West End Avenue and 60th Street, where their new high school was built a few years ago. This opens the door to a *once-in-a-lifetime, historic opportunity for BJ to go back home.*

Our community has grown exponentially in numbers and activity in the past 25 years since its revival under the leadership of Rabbi Marshall Meyer and Judy Peck. In the last quarter century BJ has become a powerhouse, radiating energy into the life of thousands of people of all ages and of diverse backgrounds. Finding suitable spaces for prayer; learning; communal fellowship; Tze'irim; families', children's, and teens' programming; and social action, as well as for our administrative offices has been a serious and expensive challenge for 20 years. We have been dispersed in a myriad of often uncomfortable and unsuitable spaces, and it has been very hard to generate and maintain a sense of a community. Going back to 89th Street will give us the home that we have earned and that we deserve as a community. It will also permit us to engage in partnerships with those who are at the forefront of Jewish innovation and to have appropriate space for experimentation and growth in a variety of areas such as education, holiday programming, music, social justice, environment, etc.

It is very important we all understand a few things:

- The 89th Street building is part of BJ's legacy; I present below some little-known but fascinating historical information.

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SOCIAL ACTION/SOCIAL JUSTICE

## Newlyweds... But Not In New York

**O**n August 21, 2009, BJ members Linda Golding and Diane Wondisford were married in Northampton, Massachusetts, by a Justice of the Peace who had moved to the state in 2004 specifically to officiate at same-sex marriages. Their first wedding gift came from the policeman who celebrated them by tearing up the parking ticket he had been writing for them while they were inside having the ceremony.

LG: Let's jump right in—what do you really think about the shanda, I mean, the situation in Albany?

DW: I feel betrayed. I believe that the majority of the state's citizens have been abandoned by a non-representative governing body in complete disarray because of a gubernatorial sex scandal. We, the people of the state of New York, deserve to be properly governed, and we all deserve to have our human rights recognized.



Linda and Diane's marriage certificate.

LG: So, as first-class tax payers we are being treated as second-class citizens.

DW: Worse—we're being held hostage.

LG: Frankly, it stuns me that in this secular country we countenance so much dishonor in the name of God.

DW: Well, what are we going to do? You sound like you're giving up the fight.

LG: Where's the evidence of the work that's been done? I am not convinced that a lot of small actions add up to enough of an impact on our lives.

DW: What happened to you and your "one step at a time" theory? The only thing there is

to do is to take a step forward every day, pick up the pace, and urge others to do the same. I've been at this for more than 40 years, and the road is still under construction. When are we going to get a proper general contractor?

LG: Forty years, bad roads. Hmph. Sounds like Moses in the desert. Point taken—where would we be if Moses really had given up the fight?

DW: So, Missus, should we talk about our out-of-state marriage?

LG: Absolutely. Right from the day of the Massachusetts decision we were talking about how to get married.

DW: Remember when Chief Justice Margaret Marshall asked us about our intentions?

LG: And we told her that as soon as New York came on board we would get married. She smiled, and I remember thinking, "Why do we have to wait?" It seemed wrong to have to wait for permission.

DW: And after waiting a few years, we decided to celebrate our seventh anniversary by getting married. Should we talk about the parking ticket or the rings?

LG: Actually, I want to talk about the contrast between how matter-of-factly our marriage was treated in Massachusetts while people in New York are still so surprised. I really see the political capital that comes with being married.

DW: It really feels different being married, doesn't it?

LG: I feel at my core calm and peaceful. What about you?

DW: I feel complete, and I feel recognized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

If you would like more information about how you can help make change here in New York, please be in touch with the Marriage Equality Hevra co-chairs: Dale Bernstein at [dalebernstein@gmail.com](mailto:dalebernstein@gmail.com) or Marlene Halpern at [jacobhw@msn.com](mailto:jacobhw@msn.com). ■

— Linda Golding and Diane Wondisford

**We, the people of the state of New York, deserve to be properly governed, and we all deserve to have our human rights recognized."**

*Linda and Diane have been members of B'nai Jeshurun since 2002 and of the Church of the Holy Apostles since 2008. They are both active in their respective religious and spiritual homes. Linda is a member of the BJ Marriage Equality Hevra and Hevra Kadisha and is completing her clinical training as a hospital chaplain. Diane serves on the CHA Vestry and is Producing Director of Music-Theatre Group.*

### Results Of The 2009/2010 KN Partnership Appeal

We are pleased to report to you that the 2009/2010 Kol Nidre Partnership Appeal exceeded its goal. So far this year, 1,174 donors made gifts to the Kol Nidre Appeal, 66% of the community, and 707 of these donors increased their gifts from the prior year. We want to give special thanks to the BJ Board of Trustees who raised a challenge fund of \$250,000 and to everyone who stretched this year to help meet this challenge by increasing their gifts. We also extend our deepest thanks to the many volunteers who personally reached out to the community on behalf of the Appeal.

We are humbled and deeply moved by the community's extraordinary, selfless generosity at such a difficult, frightening time and we want to thank everyone who made a Kol Nidre Partnership Appeal gift for their commitment to our community and fellow congregants. Your willingness to give even when it hurts demonstrates your understanding that we are interdependent and all in this together.

*Sincerely,*

**Roly Matalon, Marcelo Bronstein, Felicia Sol, Ari Priven**

## Can We Go Back Home? RABBI J. ROLANDO MATALON *continued from page 1*

- This opportunity is not likely to come again in our lifetime: just think what it would mean for the present BJ and for the future BJ to miss it.

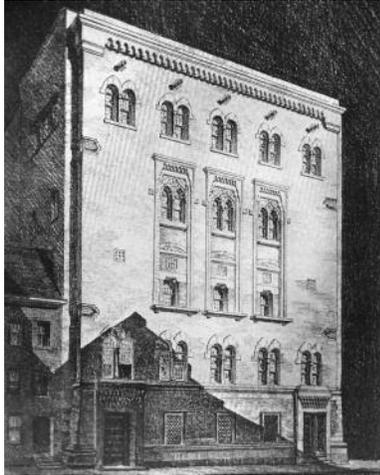
- We will not be able to acquire the building that we so deserve and need and to return home *unless every single member of BJ gets involved in this communal effort.* That means that every one of us, across the spectrum of age and financial situation, has a responsibility to make this happen. Just as our ancestors pulled their resources together for the construction of the Mishkan in the wilderness after the Exodus, every one of us must be engaged in the *sacred task* of contributing and raising the necessary funds so we can go back home.

Some interesting paragraphs from Rabbi Israel Goldstein's book *A Century of Judaism in New York: B'nai Jeshurun 1825-1925:*

The corner property at 580 and 582 West End Avenue, which had for a time housed the Religious School, Sisterhood, and club civilities, proved inadequate for the purpose, both in space and in equipment. The situation called for an institution commensurate with the size and caliber of the Congregation.

In 1926 the Congregation sold its corner property fronting forty feet on West End Avenue and purchased a lot of seventy eight feet frontage by 100 feet depth, numbers 264-272 West 89th Street, directly contiguous to the synagogue in the rear. It was a fortunate location, giving the congregation an uninterrupted control from 88th Street to 89th Street. In July 1927 building operations were commenced. Mr. Henry B. Herts, Jr., was appointed architect, with Mr. Louis A. Abramson as consulting architect, and the Lustbader Construction Company was designated for the construction of the building.

Within five months after the cornerstone laying, the building was completed, the sixth building to be used by Congregation, and the first of its kind in the course of B'nai Jeshurun's history. It was dedicated on May 20, 1928, exactly 10 years after the dedication of the 88th Street Synagogue. The first ones to dedicate the building were children of the religious school, who in the morning of that day, marched from their temporary quarters at 78 Riverside Drive, to the auditorium of the



*The Community House*

magnificent new Community Center. Mr. Milton B. Perlman, Principal of the Religious School, conducted the exercises.

The building, seven stories in height, erected at a cost of \$800,000, of which \$200,000 represented the cost of the land, was acclaimed as one of the finest structures of its kind in the country. The description by Mr. Herts, the architect, follows:

"This is the fifth edifice erected by this Congregation in the past one hundred years. It differs from the other four buildings of the Congregation in that it is devoted not alone to worship and prayer, but has been planned to serve a wider scope, as a communal center.

"The basic style of the edifice on 89th Street is similar to that of the Synagogue building on 88th Street. It stands upon a site which measures eighty feet front and about one hundred feet deep, adjoining the rear of the synagogue.

"The building as a whole, offers to the community a religious, cultural, social and recreational center, of the highest possible standard of dignity, utility and beauty.

At the Dedication Banquet, Rabbi Goldstein delivered the following words which resonate in an amazing way 82 years later.

"The time has changed and the tide has changed, B'nai Jeshurun has marked the time, not in a passive sense of futile waiting, but in an active sense of participating in the great events of the time, in a very important enterprise which challenged the loyalty of the

**■ We will not be able to acquire the building that we so deserve and need and to return home unless every single member of BJ gets involved in this communal effort."**

Jew. B'nai Jeshurun has contributed tens of thousands of dollars for the relief of Eastern European Jewry, for the colonies of Palestine, and for educational and philanthropic institutions in America.

"B'nai Jeshurun has observed the tide. A house of prayer is not enough. We have watched to see whether the Community Center idea can justify itself. We have waited to see whether our community has the strength, the enthusiasm and the loyalty to support such an institution.

"This locality has grown during the past ten years into the most important Jewish neighborhood in New York, which means the most important in America. Located in the heart of this section, the B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue has drawn to itself a multitude of worshippers who feel spiritually enriched by its ministrations.

"Children require adequate quarters where religious education may be imparted, spacious and well lighted classrooms, a commodious assembly hall, and an altogether cheerful and comfortable environment. The older boys and girls require facilities for social contacts, as well as for cultural self-expression. The men and women of the Congregation require a proper meeting place where friendship may be cultivated, where gatherings for social, recreational and educational purposes may be properly housed, and where the program of philanthropy which appertains to Congregations and Sisterhoods, may be properly deliberated and fulfilled.

"We have erected this institution, with a firm and generous gesture, with faith in our people and with hope in our future.

We approach the end of BJ's second century. Will we have the faith and the commitment to *grow back* to our home and continue to unfold the BJ dream? ■

MEMBERSHIP

## Visioning BJ Membership: Strategic Planning for 2008-2013

It was the summer of 2007, and Susan Kippur, then president of the BJ Board, challenged the Membership Committee to think hard about the future. That summer and fall we embarked on a visioning process that pushed us to articulate our mission: where we were, where we wanted to go, and how we were going to get there.

A few months later, the Membership Committee hosted a Membership Shabbat and what would become the first of many Shabbat kiddushim to follow. The parasha was Yitro, named for Moshe's father-in-law, who tells him, "The task is heavy; you cannot do it alone." We are reminded that, even before we received the Torah at Sinai, Moshe learns the importance of community.

In honor of Yitro, members who had joined BJ between 1997-2002 were invited to participate in an aliyah. Of 500 members invited, 100 chose to participate. When the aliyah was announced, Roly asked participants to stand in their places rather than come to the bimah, but there was no stopping the BJ members. People were thrilled with the opportunity to be called to the Torah, and they streamed up to the rabbin en masse. The sight of 100 people being honored for their enthusiasm and commitment to our community was inspiring. The kiddush that followed was warm; people were happy to catch up with each other, and they stayed late. It was a wonderful Shabbat morning.

When the Membership Committee envisioned what BJ membership should look like, a host of characteristics were repeatedly mentioned. We would like to be a community that is inclusive, considerate, welcoming, intimate, and supportive. We value our intergenerational connections. It is important for us to be directed and intentional, to enable each other and ourselves, and to ennoble each other and ourselves. Perhaps more than anything, we yearn for connected-ness—to each other, to our best selves, to our larger community, to our history, and to our God and our spiritual tradition.

That initial Membership Shabbat embodied many of these traits. It allowed people to connect with each other and with the Torah portion. Participants spanned a range of ages and levels of engagement with the community—and included many people who did not regularly attend Shabbat morning services. Our vision for the future of membership at BJ includes programs and events where we have abundant opportunities for connectedness and the ability to live our lives according to the three tenets of BJ: prayer, learning, and social justice.



PHOTO: BELINDA LASKY

*At the Membership Committee 2010 Tu Bishvat seder.*

In order to achieve these goals, the Membership Committee has been working alongside the BJ staff to re-envision the structure and function of the Membership Committee. Our visioning process led to a five-year strategic plan for 2008-2013. The goal of the Membership Committee as a web of connections that runs throughout BJ, supporting all facets of community life, is beginning to blossom.

Thanks to our strategic visioning, the Membership Committee planned and implemented ways to maximize the congregation's connection with its various member groups, specifically: potential members, new members, current members, and former members. The committee's objectives are to identify and engage actively attending non-members; orient and segue new members into the community; enhance the experiences and deepen the connections of current members; and become informed of the reasons for former members' decision to leave BJ so as to better address the needs of potential, new, and current members. To

achieve these goals, the committee created teams to address each member group, each team co-chaired by two Membership Steering Committee individuals.

Each team, filled with energetic and active members of the congregation, manages ongoing projects and creates new initiatives to suit the community's ever-evolving needs. Over the past few years, for example, the Potential Members Team has introduced a presence at Kabbalat Shabbat services to greet non-members and respond to inquiries about membership. It also hosted a membership Open House for families with small children and reaches out to new attendees at the Hebrew School orientation. The New Members Team continues to phone new members as they join BJ, organize intimate meet-and-greets, and encourage new members to attend the new member orientation programs. In addition, it has coordinated new members groups at synagogue dinners and other events. The Current Members Team has arranged for Shabbat morning aliyot for different constituencies (such as members who traveled on BJ's international trips) and also organized a Member Recognition Shabbat to acknowledge past leadership. Finally, the Former Members Team has reached out to lapsed members via electronic surveys to solicit information about their departure from the congregation.

In July we will enter year three of our strategic plan. A benefit of our process has been the ability to capitalize on the skills of our community members. As we begin this phase of the endeavor, we will continue to ask more people to get involved with our Teams to broaden what we are able to do and to include more people in the work of membership. Our goals include expanding our teams to include a Community Research and Survey Team as well as an Education and Communications Team.

The Community Research and Survey Team will research demographics of target Jewish families in New York City for use in future membership planning. They will explore ways to capture information about the community and anyone who attends

*(continued on page 14)*

## Get To Know BJ's New Members!

Every year, over 200 new members join the B'nai Jeshurun community. They range in age and come from a variety of backgrounds, and each finds their own unique path to BJ. Some are attracted to the music; others are inspired by BJ's commitment to social action. Some attend for years before joining; others seek out BJ because of its reputation.

In November, December, and January each year, new members have the opportunity to connect with each other and learn about getting involved at BJ through New Member Orientation Programs (NMOPs). This two-part program includes presentations about the myriad volunteer opportunities and committees at BJ, an intimate Q&A session with the rabbis, and a chance to learn about the history of BJ and each other.

Here is a glimpse into some of the individual stories from this year's group. In their own words, new members share the events that led them to join and what their experiences at BJ have been like:



"I always wanted to feel more connected to prayer. Having grown up in a Conservative congregation, I was not used to music in

*Laurie Adelman* synagogue, and over the past few years when I occasionally attended Friday night services, I felt they were not for me. However, over the summer, after a friend had joined, I went to services three weeks in a row, and on the third Shabbat realized that I was opening myself up to the prayer, and my soul was connecting to it. I

had felt this way before, but only occasionally and briefly. During BJ services, I experienced this spiritual high for a satisfying period of time.

What I also love about BJ are the congregants. They are open and warm and consist of such a diverse group of people. I have a wonderful time at the Tze'irim events and have made a strong group of friends from the group."

— **Laurie Adelman**, November 2009 NMOP



*Kitty Calhoon*

"I was new to New York, and when my mother passed away in January 2009, I needed a place to say kaddish. Having moved to

New York only a few months before, I had not yet joined a synagogue, so I looked around the neighborhood and found that BJ was the closest place with a daily minyan. I began attending morning minyan regularly and started developing community there. Over the following months, I also took Limud classes and attended the Women's Retreat. I was also moved by the spirit of services and connected to BJ's commitment to social action. After participating for several months and finding that I was getting so much personal enrichment from BJ, I decided to join.

The NMOP was another access point to BJ that made it feel more like home. At any place you have to work to find community, and BJ does a good job of providing opportunities to facilitate that. The New Member Orientation helps you feel more connected. You encounter the history of BJ

in a way that makes you feel like part of the place instead of an onlooker; it brings you in."

— **Kitty Calhoon**, November 2009 NMOP

"My wife Monika and I spent a number of years in Paris raising our kids as part of the Kehilat Geshet community with Rabbi Tom Cohen. Tom advised us to try out BJ, and we came to a Shabbat service, walking away with a collage of favorable and bewildering impressions. As bewilderment is a good thing, we decided to join. Over the summer, I ran an educational program at Columbia which included visits to a mosque and to a synagogue, and we of course visited BJ, meeting with Rabbi Matalon, who charmed everyone. The Shabbat service amazed the participants, no matter if Jews, Christians, or Muslims. It was a very magical night.

Monika and I have enjoyed services. After coming from such a small community in Paris, the High Holy Day services at BJ were challenging. The orientation arrived at just the right time, and it was a lot of fun to meet new members. We left with a better understanding of the initiatives at the synagogue and also of the tremendous engagement of so many people to make the community function."

— **Bruce Kogut and Monika Knutsson**, December 2009 NMOP

New members bring fresh energy and life to BJ each year, and we are fortunate to have a community that works so hard to make newcomers feel welcome and connected! ■

— **Sarah Verity**, Senior Membership Associate

## EMPLOYMENT HELP

## BJ's Working Knowledge Initiative

Conducted throughout November and December 2009 by BJ member Ian Miller and organizational consultants from the Accord Advisory Group, BJ's Working Knowledge Initiative presented 35 underemployed members of the New York Jewish community with practical and

psychological tools necessary to begin planning for the development of their own entrepreneurial businesses.

The project's twin emphases on experiential learning and combining the "hands on" expertise gained throughout individuals' professional lives culminated in a day-long

"boot camp" and the generation of several viable business plans!

You can see more about WKI in Newsweek's article/video "In God We Trust," [www.newsweek.com/id/227935](http://www.newsweek.com/id/227935). ■

— **Ian Miller**

## MEMBERSHIP

### Welcome! B'nai Jeshurun welcomes new members to the community (as of December 2009):

Nora Abramson	Barbara and Joseph Friedman	Daniel Laor	Susan Sanders
Laurie Adelman	Jaron Friedman	Caren and Adam Larkey	Wendy Sax
Manal Alimari	Robert Friedman and Robin Buchholz	Doug Leblang	Eva Sax-Bolder and Larry Bolder
Ayelet Amittay	Joshua and Danielle Friedman	Martin and Jill Lebwohl	Amalia Sax-Bolder
Moira Arieiv	Lara Friedrich	Steven and Sandy Lenger	Jennifer Schanes
Cari Arkin	Lindsey and Assaf Gal	Eve Lettvin	Erica Schecter
Richard and Ann Arkin	Kay Gardiner	John and Nancy Levene	Rachel Schiff
Lauren and Yoni Barkan	Allison Gelman	Ariel Levenson	Eric Schlesinger
Jacqueline Barnathan and Ken Marlin	Faya Gene	Benjamin Levin	Zvia Schoenberg
Paul and Randi Barrett	Ephraim and Theresa Gerstein	Gideon Levin	Josh and Lise Schreier
Mark Battle and Nora Littman	Warren and Amy Gleicher	Alexander Levin	Dava Schub
Sandra and Lester Baum	Shoshana Goldman	Karlin Levine-Smith	Susan Schwab and Lior Menzly
Karen Beckman and Peter Coleman	Jacklyn Goldstein	Suzanne Levy	Hannah Schwartz
Lisa Belzberg	Gail Goodman	Suzanne Lipkin	Ingrid and Maurice Schwartzberg
Sonia Ben-Yehuda	Josh Goodman	Gary Lipton	Jonathan Schwebel
Yoni Ben-Yehuda and Maris Katz	Eshai Gorshein	Juliet Litman	Jessica and Jerry Seinfeld
Marion and Stanley Bergman	Annette Gottlieb	David Litt	Rhonda Shafner and Eric Weisberg
Michael and Kathy Berkowitz	Genevieve Grant	Richard and Barbara Litt	Richard Shalowitz and Fredi Schwebel
David Berkowitz	Jill Grant	Galit Lopatin Bordereau and Samuel Bordereau	Rebecca Shapiro
Elam and Melissa Birnbaum	Abbie Greenberg	Romy Malbin	Sarah Shapiro
Leah Blakeley	Marco Greenberg and Stacey Nelkin	Robert and Mireille Manocherian	Ruth Dym Shapiro
David Blech	Judith Greenspan and Thomas Berman	Eva Meir	Joanna Sheers
Joshua and Cherie Blum	Carol Gross	Heather Merriken	Melanie Sherman and Marla Chafetz
Jon Borgardt	Marcia Grossman and Steven Fialkoff	Eileen Michaels and Melvin Prostkoff	Edmund Sherman
Alain and Marie Boubil	Deidre Grossman	Maia Michaelson	Allan Silberglait
David and Julie Brail	Adam Grunfeld	Jacob Miller and Lisa DePasquale	Billie Singer
Mandy Braun	Allison Gutman	Daniel and Suzana Minerbo	Bess Singer
Rachel and Bertie Bregman	Brian Gutman	David and Maria Molton	Benjamin Singer
Caron Brown	Elizabeth Haberfeld and Guillermo Linares	Andy Moskowitz	Lori and Jonathan Slater
Jennifer Bruno	Batya Halili	Katy Myerowitz-Vanderhoek	Justin and Rebecca Soffer
Vanessa Buisson	Cyrus and Israela Halpern	Courtney Nagel	Linda Spritzer
Yisrael and Avital Campbell Hochstein	Eugene Hertzberg	Ben Nathan	Anna Stern
Lila Cardell	Mark Highman and Rachel Goldfine	Daniel Nathel	Karen and Jeff Stern
Sheryl Checkman	Anita Highton	Joshua Nathel	Amanda Sutker
Emily Chinitz	Rebecca Hiner	Matthew and Allison Nathel	Naomi Taitz
Rebecca Chynsky	Ari and Leslie Hirsch	Patricia and Javier Neiman	Tanaquil Taubes
Benjamin Chynsky	Elizabeth Hirsch and Karen Pratt	Lindsey Newman	Gabrielle Thal-Pruzan
Sara Cohen	Jill Howard	Itamar Niesvizky-Kogan	Shari Thomashow
Phil Cohen and Jennifer Padnick	Monica Iachan	Bruce and Marsha Noble	Lois Tobin
Harvey Cohn	Melissa Iachan	Elaine Novick	Carol Turner
Francine Collins	Susan Illman	Leonie Nowitz	Neal and Sivya Twersky
Smadar Dayan	Abraham Ingberman	Emily Pearson	Anne Ulevitch
Adam Delson	Carole Isenberg and Pamela Serure	Esther Perel and Jack Saul	Aaron and Aly Viny
Susan Dess	Ilene Johnson and Rachel Balaban	Karen Perolman	Joel Weber
Nicole Doniger	Michael Jones	Jamie and Harry Phinney	Andrew Weinstein
Haruka Ebisawa	Brett Kalikow	Alan and Betsy Plush	Shana Wertheimer
Jeff Eckstein and Daniella Carvalho	Raz Kaplan	Susan Pollet	Rachel Wile
Debra Eder and Stephane Guez	Deborah Karp	Barbara and Stephen Pyles	Leesa Willett
Barbara Egdal	Marion Katz	Judy and Bernard Rachelle	Marilyn Williams
Anne Eidelman and Eric Slaim	Menachem Katz	Jane Ranzman	Anna Wipfler
Marcy Einhorn	Adam Katz	Ayelet Reisman	Peter and Claire Wolf Smith
Jon Elliott	Jay Kernis and Gwen Billings Kernis	Debra and Jeremy Roberts	Liora and Stephen Yalof
David Ettinger and Kitty Calhoon	Michael Kirsch and Nicole Hildebrandt	Martha Rose	Ellen Yaroshefsky
Robin Felberbaum	Eileen Kitzis	Terry Rosenbaum	Dahlia Yoeli
Rachel Feuer	Neil and Eileen Klar	Sarah Rosenberg	Matthew Yoeli
Alan and Laraine Fischer	Elaine and Robert Klein	David and Dara Rosenberg	Robert and Karen Youdelman
Anna Fleder	Willard Knox	Judy Roth and Stephen Zeldes	Debra Zarne
Daniel Fogel	Bruce Kogut and Monika Knutsson	Micah Rubin	Regina Zimmerman-Mosesson and Neil Mosesson
Claire Fram	Stanley Kramer and Vivian Bader	Galia Rubinstein	George and Amy Zook
Robert Friedlaender		Felicia Rudolph	
Deborah Friedman and Armanda Squadrilli		Yves Saada and Stacey Schwartz	

## BJ B'Yahad: Passion in Action

After a year of community-wide brainstorming, the development of a Task Force, and a coordinated publicity effort to encourage participation, BJ B'Yahad morphed into a reality this fall as more than 60 members signed on to participate.

The structured program was designed to afford members the opportunity to meet and socialize with others in small groups and to renew their involvement by being exposed to the numerous classes and volunteer opportunities that the congregation offers.

Two Kvutzot (groups) were formed to ensure intimacy in the experience of three evenings (including a Shabbat dinner). The plan was enhanced with the commitment by the Rabbis, Board members, committee chairs, and lay leaders to participate in the events.

The first sessions were each attended by more than 25 members. Everybody welcomed these gatherings as a new opportunity to personally revitalize their connection to BJ. After the catered buffet dinner and time to socialize, the group met as a whole for introductions and then broke into smaller groups to promote personal

interaction and explore how members would like to deepen their connection to the community.

In the first session, we learned that many members did not read Hebrew and were frustrated by the lack of available transliterated prayer books in the synagogue, prompting the task force to not only relay this to the administration, but to ensure that transliterated songs would be available at the upcoming Shabbat dinners. In the second session, many members indicated a desire to be part of a havurah that would meet regularly and allow for deeper, sustained connections with other members.

The most striking feature of these sessions was that, despite the diversity of ages, backgrounds, and life experiences, all these members shared a heartfelt passion for the BJ experience: the prayer service, the music, the inclusiveness, and the social action initiatives.

The Shabbat dinners that followed were warm, intimate gatherings of 10 to 12 members, graciously hosted by lay and Board member volunteers. They were filled with delicious homemade food, singing, and

**This is BJ at its best ... reaching out and encouraging those who feel disconnected, or uninvolved, to reconnect and become revitalized in the process. "**

discussion of Shabbat customs and of the weekly parashah.

The third session included a wine tasting and presentations by committee chairs of volunteer opportunities. This is BJ at its best—a passionate effort to strengthen the cohesiveness of our community and its social action initiatives by reaching out and encouraging those who feel disconnected, or uninvolved, to reconnect and become revitalized in the process.

On behalf of myself and my co-chair, Emily Weiss, I would like to thank Assistant Executive Director Belinda Lasky, the Task Force members, Board members, Shabbat hosts, and wine-tasting hosts for their time, effort, and generosity. ■

— Susan Etra

*Susan Etra is co-chair of the BJ B'Yahad Task Force and a former member of the Board of Trustees. She and her family have been members of BJ for more than 15 years.*

## BJ Dialogue Series on the Jewish Future: What is Essential?

What questions should we be asking? What issues should we be addressing? How do we respond in a relevant way to the challenges of the future? Join us for the final two dialogues in the series.

**Saturday, April 17 • 4:30–6:00PM**  
**Ruth Messinger and Tobi Kahn**



**Ruth Messinger** is President of American Jewish World Service. **Tobi Kahn** is a painter and sculptor with works in major museums, corporate, and private collections.

**Tikkun Leil Shavuot**  
**Tuesday, May 18 • 8:30PM Service**



**9:00–10:30PM:**  
**Dr. Deborah Lipstadt and Jonathan Rosen**

**Deborah Lipstadt** is an author and Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University. **Jonathan Rosen**, author and former columnist for *The Forward*, is the editorial director of the



Nextbook/Shocken Jewish Encounters series.



**10:30PM–midnight:**  
**Rabbi David Ellenson and Dr. Devora Steinmetz**

**David Ellenson** is President of Hebrew Union College. **Devora Steinmetz** is the founder of Beit Rabban, a teacher of rabbinic literature, and faculty member at Yeshivat Hadar. ■

REFLECTIONS

## Loss and Life in My Small-Town Shul

I did not grow up as a member of a synagogue or knowing many Jewish rituals and traditions. When I recently experienced the unfortunate loss of my father, I got a powerful lesson in Judaism and what it means to be a member of B'nai Jeshurun.

After six long months of battling a variety of illnesses, my father passed away during the recent holiday season. This was my first time dealing with a significant loss, and needless to say, it was a very painful process that brought up complicated and deep emotions from both my past and present. I was actually surprised by how the grief would overwhelm me; it was so deep, like nothing I had ever experienced before. Time stood still, and it was hard to engage in my day-to-day routines. In addition to the looming loss, I felt a daunting sense of responsibility handling all aspects of his medical treatment and end-of-life care. In spite of the incredible loving support of my husband, family, and friends, I often felt worried about important decisions that needed to be made.

During the final days of my father's life, I called Rabbi Felicia at our synagogue. Writing this note to my congregation, I am filled with emotion thinking of the extraordinary comfort that I received from making this call. Imagine a boat lost at sea and the Coast Guard coming to its rescue; Rabbi Felicia was that rescue. She helped me with decisions, gave me direction, and made sense of my confusion. The Jewish traditions, ones that I had been totally unfamiliar with, along with Felicia's gentle, loving support, guided me at every step of the process.

At first, Felicia explained to me how the B'nai Jeshurun community has a group of dedicated volunteers who would perform the sacred ritual of tahara, a cleansing preparation of the body for burial. It is still remarkable to me that people from our community would give so generously of their attention and time to lovingly care for my father. I felt comfort knowing that his body would be treated with respect. In my

mind, they were helping him to be more comfortable; crazy, but true. I was also taught the tradition of burying the deceased in a white robe or shroud. Felicia explained that the color white symbolized purity and that Jews are buried in this to show that in death we are all equals. No matter who you were in your life, in the end we are all the same. This beautiful and simple concept resonated for me and saved me from the excruciating decision of choosing the clothing for my father's burial.

Together, we had agreed that Plaza Jewish Community Chapel would arrange for the funeral. The mission of this very special nonprofit is to ensure that every member of the Jewish community receive a dignified and respectful Jewish funeral. The staff at Plaza was enormously helpful, kind, and professional, and it made a significant difference for me to know that they were not doing this as a "business."

The night before the funeral, Felicia met with my whole family to reflect on our feelings about my father. Together, we spoke, laughed, and cried about this person who played such a momentous role in our lives. Felicia helped us to face emotions that we were too uncomfortable to feel on our own. Her work with us made my family feel so much closer for the graveside service that was the following morning. Felicia encouraged us to eulogize my father, which we all did, including my children. This was something I didn't expect to happen and in the end brought significant meaning to the day.

Finally, we sat shiva for three days, and although we were all very tired from what we had been through, the outpouring of love from friends and loved ones was incredible. It is rare in life that you feel so much unconditional love and support from so many people at one time. Visits from Marcelo and Ari along with other members of the synagogue made us feel we were members of a small-town shul.

The mourning process continues for my family and me, but I do feel deeply blessed

Together, we spoke, laughed, and cried about this person who played such a momentous role in our lives. "

and grateful for the community and synagogue of which we are a part. My father always wanted me to become a member of a synagogue; it is very powerful that now that he is gone, I can finally understand why he wanted it for me.

B'Shalom. ■

— Carolyn Meyer-Wartels

*Carolyn Meyer-Wartels has been a BJ member since 1998 along with her husband, Gary, and children, Rebecca and Noah. She works as a psychotherapist and parent educator in private practice.*

## Yom Hashoah Service and Events

**Sunday, April 11, 6:45PM**, 88th Street Sanctuary: Join us for our Yom Hashoah Service when we will be reading and hearing the names of relatives of BJ members who were murdered during the Shoah. Our commemoration service will be followed by a screening of "Out Of Europe," followed by remarks and Q&A by Richard Lerner, Director and Producer, moderated by Myriam Abramowicz. The all-night vigil of the Reading of the Names will be at the JCC in Manhattan starting at 10:00PM on Sunday, April 11 to 8:30AM on Monday, April 12. The BJ reading slot will be announced and available on the BJ website, [www.bj.org](http://www.bj.org).



Lerner family, Antwerp

## Ruth the Moabite, David the King, and the Fallacy of Biological Judaism

**W**hy are we commanded (Devarim 16:11) to celebrate Shavuot by rejoicing with "... your male and female slave ... and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst"? Why include them? Are we not different from them—surely the stranger is not in our biological family? Were such strangers not among our enemies in the opening of Bemidbar?

As a geneticist who studies DNA, I am happy that our texts make clear we should not worry so much about our biological families in these matters: David, the king and the herald of our Messiah, is himself the descendent—twice!—of women who were fatherless, strangers, and widows.

Tamar was the first. She and Yehudah were parents to Peretz. From Peretz came Hezron, from Hezron came Ram, from Ram came Amminadab, from Amminadab came Salmon, from Salmon came Boaz.

Ruth was the second. She and Boaz were parents to Obed. From Obed came Jesse, and from Jesse came David Ha'Melekh.

While we wait to learn who will come from David's line to bring us a final redemption, let us consider that it might not be too early, even now, to draw some lessons from his decidedly non-royal family tree.

From any one person to another unrelated person, about one letter in a thousand, more or less, will be different when their three-billion-letter DNAs are compared. There is no biological data in support of the notion of being a Jew solely through the inheritance of a single specific DNA sequence, nor will there ever be such evidence. There is no chance of some human genomes being Jewish and others not; biology makes all people truly equal.

Though not by DNA, we Jews are capable of becoming distinctively different from other people. We can become different because all people—whether son, daughter, male, female, Levite, stranger, fatherless, or widow—are born with a brain that can learn and teach and change its mind, all without

any change in DNA. Experiences of the first two years, before language emerges, lay down much of the stable circuitry of the thinking brain. From the emergence of the mind in infancy and even after these formative years, the brain forever retains plasticity in its circuits.

It never loses the capacity to link past with present experience by what we sense as familiarity. Brain-cell connections are made and broken throughout life; these are experienced variously as sensation, perception, memory, repression, and—for my argument's sake, most importantly—as ongoing teaching and learning.

From the Jewish perspective in particular, genes cannot propel us toward religious pursuits and experiences. Consider the following quote from the Rambam, "Mishneh Torah," Hilchot Talmud Torah, Chapter 3:

Three crowns were conferred upon Israel: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty.

Aharon merited the crown of priesthood, as [Numbers] states: "And it will be an eternal covenant of priesthood for him and his descendants after him."

David merited the crown of royalty, as [Psalms] states: "His seed will continue forever, and his throne be as the sun before Me."

The crown of Torah is set aside, waiting, and ready for each Jew, as [implied by Deuteronomy]: "The Torah which Moses commanded us is the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." Whoever desires may come and take it.

Rambam then goes on to make the point in his own special way. He says that when hiring a teacher of Torah for yourself or your child, you should give a learned mamzer precedence over an ignorant man, even if that ignorant man happens to be the Kohen Gadol himself.

Rambam is pushing a point, to make a critical differentiation. By distinguishing the

availability of the "inheritance" of Torah, from the father-to-son inheritance of priestly obligations and privileges, and from the royal prerogative to pass a Jewish kingdom to one's child, he is telling us that no aspect of Jewish life available to him was biologically inherited. The inherited priesthood needed a context of Temple sacrifice, the Davidic reign needed a royal family at the head of a Jewish nation. In his time Jews had neither; they did, of course, have Torah.



*Tamar and Judah, by Rembrandt*

But by "Whoever desires may come and take it," Rambam is saying not only that the Crown of Torah is not

inherited, but also that no aspect of one's wish to receive the Crown of Torah can be inherited either. Both are wholly a matter of choice and the will to follow Torah at each generation; neither is at all a matter of biological inheritance.

So, to return to Shavuot, the Book of Ruth teaches us that even the Davidic line—with all it implies for our future—emerges by teachable and learnable action, not through DNA.

This allows us to make the assumption (precious to us as Jews) that free will must remain undiminished for all time, so that when one chooses a forbidden act, one may then nevertheless, upon reflection, choose the work of teshuvah. That is the significance of the emergence at the end of the Book of Ruth, of the story of Tamar and Yehuda, the ancestors of Boaz and, through Ruth, of David himself.

When Yehudah realizes that the woman he thought was a prostitute—whom he has made pregnant, and whom he is prepared to have burned to death—is in fact the widow of his sons, he says, "She is more in the right than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And the text goes on to say, "And he was not intimate with her

*(continued on page 14)*

## LIMUD

## In the Thickets of Jewish Learning at Me'ah

This article was first published in *Jewish Book World*.

**O**n Saturday mornings, when the Torah scroll is carried through the aisles of the synagogue, and congregants press forward, tallitot in hand, to kiss the velvet cover, there's a moment of visceral connection. As Jews, we don't kiss beads, icons, statues or crosses. We kiss words we believe to contain the divine spark. And these words are not printed on paper, they're inscribed by hand on parchment, and the parchment is rolled around two wooden cylinders. By kissing the Torah, we're revering not only the words themselves, but the antiquated form in which they appear. We're honoring both the message and the medium, acknowledging that books were once written differently and read differently. Every time the Torah is uncovered and unrolled, we travel back in time.

What makes these words holy? When did they first appear? Who wrote them? What is the history of the people who have carried the Torah for three and a half millennia? In September 2007, when I registered for the Me'ah Program, I was attempting to answer some of these questions for myself. Me'ah is a two-year adult education program founded by Boston's Hebrew College in 1994 and it is now offered at many different synagogues in the Northeast.

The course was divided into four semester-long sections—Bible, Rabbinics, the Medieval Period and the Modern Period. In Sharon Keller's Bible class, we used the *Jewish Study Bible* as our guide and immediately our sense of the "Book" as a monolithic, seamless whole was exploded, and what replaced it was a sense of excitement and revelation at the multiplicity of points of view, voices and time periods contained within the text. Equally thrilling were the different types of interpretation—the comparative approach, the lens of historical criticism, and the methods of source criticism and feminist criticism.

In Rabbinics, with Marcie Lenk, we explored the system the rabbis created after the destruction of the Second Temple and a new

way to live within the same framework was constructed and eventually codified. Of the many things I found remarkable was the fluidity of the *Mishnah*, the *Palestinian Talmud*, the *Babylonian Talmud* and that the texts were not unchanged until the printing press was invented. Only then did an authoritative version emerge. With the advent of the digital revolution, one wonders what these texts will look like a 100 years from now.

Ultimately what I loved most about this two year adventure into the thickets of Jewish learning was that there were no easy answers ..."

Benjy Gampel, our Medieval Period teacher, immediately tackled "medieval" as a presentist misnomer, a modern Western European construct. From a Jewish perspective, this is the time period where Jews lived under the rival monotheistic cultures of Christianity and Islam. Within Christendom, Jews were seen as the direct heirs of the Bible but also as Christ-killers. They could testify to the truth of the Old Testament prophecies, and for that reason were kept alive but in a debased status.

The rise of Islam as a world religion with eighty to ninety percent of world Jewry under its control by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century meant a different set of freedoms and limitations for Jews. Along with Christians, they were classed as "dhimmi" in the Muslim world and the prevailing attitude towards them was toleration, but not equality.

The notion of equality for the Jews came with the Enlightenment, and the birth of the modern nation-state. The Modern Period was taught by Jonathan Gribetz, and, as always, each class came with revelations, rafts of new learning. As with the study of the Bible, the picture of Jewish life that emerged was anything but monolithic. There were many rival nationalisms and differing forms of Zionism. In the early years of Zionism, Israel as the homeland of



the Jewish people was not a foregone conclusion. Other territories that were discussed were Argentina and Uganda (which was actually Kenya). Some of the foundation documents we studied were David Ben-Gurion's "On the Arab Question" (January, 1937), as well as The Palestinian National Charter (July 1968) and we had a particularly lively class discussing the Palestinian denial of Jewish nationhood as well as the Zionist denial of Palestinian nationhood.

Ultimately what I loved most about this two year adventure into the thickets of Jewish learning was that there were no easy answers, no certitude about whether Moses and Abraham really existed outside of the Torah, no comfortable platitudes about the thorny politics of present day Israel. As we traveled in time, we tried to look at each generation of Jews as they saw themselves. Now, when I reach forward to kiss the Torah, I realize I'm celebrating my own agency, my desire to connect to the ancient words, as well as to the layered, non-linear history of the Jewish people, and that the spark of the divine rests in that endlessly shifting, restless human search for meaning. ■

— Anne Landsman

*Anne Landsman is the internationally acclaimed novelist whose most recent novel, The Rowing Lesson, won South Africa's 2009 Sunday Times Fiction Prize and the 2009 M-Net Literary Award for English fiction. It was also shortlisted for the \$100,000 Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature and the Harold U. Ribalow Prize. She has been a BJ member for fourteen years.*

## Mazal Tov

**To the following members and their families on their b'nai mitzvah (February and March):**

Aaron Michael Gottesfeld	Daniel Piciotto
Jordan Ofek	Farris Bienstock
Cora Browner	Ariel Kaminsky
Sarah Herring	Ben Kessler
William Herring	

**To the following members and their families (through March 5):**

Jules, Susan and David Frankel on the engagement of their daughter and sister, Leora Frankel, to Andrew Sage.

Marisha Krupkin and Dennis Neier on the engagement of their daughter and step-daughter, Abbe Meryl, to Isaac Josef Feder.

BJ Cantorial intern Shira Wallach on her recent engagement to David Stern.

Marshall T. Meyer Rabbinic Fellow Michelle Dardashti and her husband Nathan Sher on the birth of their daughter, Eden Bina.

Ernest Adams, Karen Sander, and Eliot on the birth of their son and brother, Gabriel Lior Adams.

Elain and Barry Waldman on the birth of their son, David Calmon.

Michelle, Jeff, Zachary and Benjamin Feig on the birth of their son and brother, Jacob Aaron.

Jake and Anna Krayn on the birth of their son, Aaron Samuel.

Martin, Jill, Charlie and Eli Lebwohl on the birth of their daughter and sister, Jenny Helen.

Stephanie and Victor Brener on the birth of their grandson, Jacob Oliver Saltzman.

Ami Weil and Todd Chanko on receiving the Bonei Beit Rabban Award from the Beit Rabban Day School.

Lois Alexander and Robert Mandel on their recent engagement.



## Condolences (through March 5)

**The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the death of our beloved member** Kallia Bokser and extends sincere condolences to her entire family.

**The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the death of our beloved member** Vivienne Fisher and extends sincere condolences to Tony, Oliver and Annabel Fisher on the death of their beloved wife and mother.

**The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the death of our beloved member** Phyllis Schatsky, and extends sincere condolences to her husband Sam, her children Gary and David, her daughter-in-law Susan, and her grandchildren Max, Maya, Ronen and Binah.

**The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the death of our beloved member** Alexander Winberg and extends sincere condolences to his family and all his loved ones.

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

Avi, Lorraine and Maia Ashman on the death of their beloved mother, mother-in-law and grandmother, Sarah Zalstein Ashman.

Don and Rochelle Cohen on the death of their beloved brother and brother-in-law, Gary Cohen.

Miriam Harris-Kaplan on the death of her beloved great-uncle, Milton Mariamoff.

Nina Horak on the death of her beloved mother, Ruth Horak.

Jane Fuchsberg on the death of her beloved father, Seymour Fuchsberg.

Richard, Rosemary and Brett Kalikow, Dale, Brett, Wade and Weslee Yacker on the death of Richard and Dale's beloved mother, Dorothy Kalikow.

Judith, Leon and Alex Jacobson on the death of their beloved son and brother, Matthew Jacobson.

Shoshana Jedwab on the death of her beloved aunt, Mildred Livson.

Naava and Alona Katz on the death of their beloved grandmother, Lillian Tashlik.

**YOUTH & FAMILY EDUCATION**

**“What if that was my house?”**

**The 8th- and 9th-Grade Teen Service Learning Trip to New Orleans**

**O**ver MLK weekend, 30 8th and 9th graders from the BJ Teen Program travelled to New Orleans with Jewish Funds for Justice to continue in the rebuilding efforts left by Hurricane Katrina over four years ago. In the spirit of Dr. King’s and President Obama’s national call for service and action, BJ teens engaged in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, both physically through direct service work and mentally and spiritually, taking part in challenging discussions about privilege, racism, injustice, and inequality in New Orleans and New York. The BJ teens kept journals throughout their experience; we hope their stories and work continue to inspire others.

— Ivy Schreiber,  
Director of Education (Youth and Family)



*BJ teens engage in service learning in New Orleans.*

The New Orleans trip for me has been, without a doubt, one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. While we cry out for peace in Darfur, Israel, and other conflict regions, it seems that America has forgotten the disaster right here in our backyards: Katrina. It has been nearly five years since the hurricane, yet New Orleans is nowhere near a full recovery. It is astounding for me to see a gorgeously rebuilt and renovated downtown, but a New Orleans East that looks very much like Katrina hit only a year or two ago.

For me, seeing this isn’t easy. It’s looking at an America I never knew existed or perhaps didn’t want to know existed. I feel like I’m in a foreign country. But despite all this, or maybe because of it, it has been immensely gratifying to help this community rebuild so much of what they lost. — Miko Zeldes-Roth

My experiences have been eye-opening and meaningful: From painting primer on the walls of Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation’s new office building to listening to people’s stories about losing their homes. Seeing a slide show about the toxic dumping near waterways in New Orleans East really struck me. No one should have to live so close to these toxic fumes. Seeing the Vietnamese people struggle to regain what they deserve has moved me. It’s a frightening environment to live in, yet they don’t give up and stop the fight. They continue to raise awareness about what’s going on in their surroundings. Their outlook seemed calm, and this is also powerful.

Another thing that I am enjoying is the group bonding. Meeting new people has been terrific, but I have also become a lot closer to people I was already friends with. The singing during the evening Kabbalat Shabbat service was a great experience.

— Saskia Naegele

We were met by very informative people, are painting a new office, and making a lot of new friends. Spending an entire Shabbat together with everyone was a brand new experience that enlightened Shabbat to me in a way I never realized was possible. The Shabbat morning service at the Touro Synagogue was also very different. The rabbi brought up some very important issues like the difference between good and evil or if G-d created natural disasters or not and if G-d created them for a reason.

— Malcolm Fox

Before I came to New Orleans, I thought I would see things that would be new to me and that would be very important. I was right. When we arrived at the Vietnamese community we attended a press conference aimed to publicize the problems of garbage dumps and landfills for their community. It was amazing how united they were for a common goal. I don’t think just any community could do that, no matter how important their goal is. People around the world should learn from the New Orleans Vietnamese community how to come together for a cause.

**“The New Orleans trip for me has been, without a doubt, one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life.”**

While painting the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation office, it felt great to see how much they appreciated us coming to help them. It would have taken them much longer to complete this project without us.

Another amazing thing is talking to a lot of people about their Katrina experiences. It was interesting to hear how they dealt with some specific problems like the disgusting, rotten, maggot-infested food in the refrigerators or how they loved traffic because it meant people had finally returned. All in all, it was a great experience for me to witness other communities and to become inspired to make a difference. — Nate Gertzman

When we landed in New Orleans, I really didn’t know what to expect. I was educated about what had happened in New Orleans because of Katrina, and I was eager to help out, learn more, and see it firsthand. On the drive to the Marquette House, the hostel where we stayed, I saw some of the destroyed and uninhabitable houses. That opened my eyes and made me think in a whole new way. I thought: “What if that was my house?” I was grateful it wasn’t.

*(continued on page 13)*

## Encircled by the Torah

### A Parent and Child Bar/Bat Mitzvah Experience

**i** recently embarked on the bar mitzvah preparation of our third child. B'nai Jeshurun has several parent/child shared-learning sessions during the preparation process. To be honest, I initially attended the first meeting with no higher goal than to make my son feel special entering this process, as he knows how I felt about the experience with our older two children. But now we find ourselves embarking on another wonderful learning and spiritual experience.

That afternoon began with the children learning what parashah they will be studying and reading from the Torah. They then divided up into the five books and lined themselves in the order of the sequence of the parshiyot. The parents were asked to do the same, standing behind them in a circle around Frankel Hall. What followed was unbelievable. The Torah was unrolled from beginning to end, around the room, punctuated by the children and their

parents. The parents held the massive unfurled Torah in a circle, supporting it at the edges of the parchment very carefully on the top and on the bottom. It looked like the Torah was suspended in mid-air around the hall. The children walked around the room as they located their parshiyot and stood at that place. I watched their faces light up as they beamed with wonder at finding their own place in the eternal circle of learning seen for the first time as words and as a piece of a larger cycle. Their classmates arranged themselves according to b'nai mitzvah date as a sequence to be repeated on Shabbatot throughout the year to come.

Rabbi Felicia then asked the children to identify the different patterns of letters, paragraphs, and songs, which could be seen as patterns on the parchment. They noticed how the books are separated by space and how the songs and poems in the Torah are written in stanzas and how one

“The Torah was unrolled from beginning to end, around the room, punctuated by the children and their parents.”

can identify the different indentations.

The shared nature of this learning demonstrated to my child that the bar mitzvah preparation experience is an extension of our shared family life, love, and values. The program gave me an up-close-and-personal opportunity to see, feel, and study the text of the Torah, an experience I was never given growing up as a Jewish woman in my childhood Temple, where being female precluded me from touching or reading from the Torah. As each of my children bring their unique personalities and characteristics to this experience, so is each spiritual journey that I undergo with them along the way to becoming a Jewish adult unique and a new experience to be embraced.

I hope to share this journey with many of you. ■ — Nancy Kline

## “What if that was my house?” *continued from page 12*



PHOTO: IVY SCHREIBER

From left: Ben Zucker, Abbe Klein

I was excited because the documentary film we had seen about it the Sunday before really inspired me. When we went to the press conference, I realized that they still had a problem with the landfills! I was so mad about the corruption of the garbage company and the government who didn't want to spend more to dispose of the materials properly. I saw how this affected not only New Orleans East, but all of New Orleans because the hazardous materials made the environment toxic and unsafe. I

am still angry about this, and it's made me want to help in any way I can.

New Orleans still has its spirit, but so much work still needs to be done. — Jake Mervis

The school at Blair Grocery is an amazing concept for children who need an alternative high school. It is also a farm, and much work is needed to maintain it. I asked one of the workers if he could turn the huge pile of compost himself, and he said that they could only do it with groups. So, without us, these piles cannot become compost, and they could not sustain their farm and be the town's local grocer. I feel needed here in a way I've never felt anywhere else.

Also, I've learned that every time you spend money—buying a car, sofa, even just a pack of gum—you're essentially voting for which products you like better. This causes companies to make more money and places

things in demand. It's interesting because if you're under 18, maybe you're not as powerless as you think! — Sophie Bokor

It's sad here. The farm where we're working is the only lively place, and everywhere else is just vacant. There's still so much more to rebuild; more we need to do to help. We have learned a lot from these past two days of work. I appreciate where I live and that we don't have to move often due to storms when everything you own is gone.

As I was driving around the Lower Ninth Ward, I realized the human need to help people, and that the world will always be imperfect. But I believe that everything can get better. Humans are created in G-d's image, and G-d may not be perfect, so humans and the world won't be perfect either, but the world can be healed ... starting with you.

— Anonymous ■

**Visioning BJ Membership** *continued from page 4*

community events and will work with other departments to identify membership trends. The mission of the Education and Communications Team will be to raise the profile of the membership committees throughout the BJ community as well as inform the community about the obligations of membership at BJ, such as becoming an active volunteer and acknowledging the importance of prayer. Stay tuned to the *Kol Hadash* and *Kol Jeshurun*—perhaps you will see short teachings about community coming soon!

The volunteers and staff of Membership are dedicated to serving as a safety net for BJ members. Because we represent a cross-section of the community, no doubt you've crossed paths with us at some point. We can

connect you to programs, events, classes, and new friends at BJ. Though 2013 seems far off, we are proud that we will have completed our five-year investment of time and financial resources engaging the whole community. ■

— **Sofia Hubscher, Samara Minkin, Belinda Lasky, and Sarah Verity**

*Sofia Hubscher and Samara Minkin are the co-chairs of the Membership Steering Committee. The following are co-chairs of each team: Potential Members, Joe Antenson and Judy Spivak; New Members, Harriet Goren and Andrea Newman; Current Members, Sheila Bleckner and Susan Fishman; Former Members, Barbara Simon. The Membership staff who support these initiatives are Belinda Lasky and Sarah Verity.*

**Ruth, David** *continued from page 8*

again." Yehudah's tshuvah, Tamar's honesty and courage, Boaz's kindness, and Ruth's simple vow that "Your people are my people and your Lord is my Lord," are unexpected acts of free will.

Shavout teaches us that biology without free will leaves us with nothing to forgive, nothing to teach, no chance for reinterpretation at a later date and, most important of all, no chance for tshuvah on the part of anyone. ■

— **Robert Pollack**

*Robert Pollack is Professor of Biological Sciences and Director, Center for the Study of Science and Religion, Earth Institute, Columbia University. Professor Robert Pollack and his wife Amy have been members of BJ since 1994.*

**DONATIONS** (received as of February 12, 2010)

**Adult Education Fund**

Joseph Antenson and Lawrence Gifford in celebration of Vicki Abrams' birthday, Mary and Stefan Krieger's anniversary and in memory of Mildred Angerman  
David Fitterman in memory of Dorothy Kalikow  
Alan and Mimi Frank in celebration of Mary and Stefan Krieger's anniversary  
Morty and Bernice Levine in memory of Dorothy Kalikow  
Michael Rand in celebration of Mary and Stefan Krieger's anniversary  
Bernice Todres in honor of Leora Frankel and Andrew Sage's engagement and in memory of Phyllis Schatsky  
Anne Ziff in memory of Vivienne Fisher

**Bikkur Holim Fund**

Nancy Greenblatt and Jack Richard in memory of Phyllis Schatsky and Vivienne Fisher  
Phyllis Silver in memory of her husband, Stanfred Silver and in honor of Sharon Stein and Rory Butler  
Barry and Elain Waldman in memory of Mildred Angerman and Elly Sue Finkelstein  
Anne Ziff in memory of Phyllis Schatsky

**BJ/SPSA Homeless Shelter Fund**

Ira Gerstein and Debbie Zapata-Gerstein  
William Gordon  
Susan King in memory of Sol, Jennie and Phyllis King  
Glenn Marlowe and Judy Geller-Marlowe in celebration of Fay Pallen's new grandson, Daniel, and in memory of Dorothy Kalikow  
Helene and Seymour Schechter in memory of Malka Yenta  
Suzanne Schecter and Todd Ruback in memory of Anna Robson  
Miranda Einhorn in honor of Roly Matalon and the B'nei Mitzvah staff at BJ

**Children Services Fund**

Richard Ehrenhaus  
Lowell and Deborah Kirschner

**Daily Minyan Fund**

Morty and Bernice Levine in memory of Phyllis Schatsky  
Elaine Nevins in honor of Shira Nadich Levin  
Phyllis Silver in honor of morning minyan

**Etz Hayim Fund**

Helene Diamant Glass in memory of her mother, Regina Landwirth Diamant

Dennis Neier and Marisha Krupkin in memory of her father, Michael Krupkin and his father, Murray Neier

**General Fund**

Myriam Abramowicz in honor of Charles Borrok and Michael Sonnenfeldt  
William and Vicki Abrams in celebration of Roly and Talia's 28th wedding anniversary  
Ilana and David Adelman in celebration of Sarah Adelman becoming a Bat Mitzvah  
Joel Aronoff  
Lore and Murray Azaria  
Martin and Shelley Becker  
Benjamin and Annette Blom  
Jennifer Blum  
John Bonavita and Harold Goldman in celebration of Josephine Stern becoming a Bat Mitzvah  
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Thomas and Donna Divine in celebration of Mary and Stefan Krieger's anniversary and Leora Frankel and Andrew Sage's engagement

Kay Gardiner in celebration of Carrie Bergmann becoming a bat mitzvah  
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Abigail Moore and Leonard Wasserman in honor of Robert Gruenspecht as Hatan Torah 5770, Barbara and Len Sugin's daughter becoming a Bat Mitzvah, and a refuah shleimah for Leonard Wasserman  
Malcolm and Estelle Newman in memory of Judy Wertheim  
Aviva and Maurice Raichelson in memory of her mother, Anne Zuckerman  
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Ralph and Merryl Klein in memory of Helen Radin  
Harold and Helen Lehrman in memory of Phyllis Schatsky

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**Hevra Kadisha Fund**

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Paula Wisnik in memory of Julius Wisnik

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**Teen Program Fund**

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**Yizkor Fund**

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Shelley Bernard in memory of her nephew, Steve Teitelbaum  
Elliott and Toby Bird in memory of their fathers  
Ann Birstein and Cathrael Kazin in memory of her mother, Clara Gordon Birstein  
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Ellen Perelman in memory of her aunt, Frlemke  
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Miriam Perrin in memory of her mother, Marian Lynam  
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**KOL HADASH new voice**  
April 2010

The *Kol Hadash* is published every other month (in 2010: February, April, June/July, September/October, November/December).  
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Designer:  
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# KOL HADASH *new voice* • APRIL 2010

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