

Using Jacob’s Ladder for the High Holy Days

BY RABBI MARCELO R. BRONSTEIN

“If we approach the High Holy Days with a ‘check off’ mindset, without recognizing the magical opportunities this precious time brings to the soul, it is truly a missed chance to awaken our inner selves.”

As a psychologist and rabbi, I am moved by how Rodger Kamenetz, author of *The History of Last Night’s Dream*, works with dreams to discover the hidden path to the soul. Last May, when Rodger spoke at BJ, he challenged the traditional methods of dream interpretation and urged us to reflect on what the dreamer *feels* in the dream “to reorient us to a life centered in the heart.”

In the book of Genesis, Jacob dreams of angels ascending and descending a ladder. In this archetypal dream, the ladder is the connection not only between heaven and earth, but also between the conscious and the unconscious—between what we see and what we bury. Rodger extends the meaning of the ladder to include how we live our everyday lives on two axes: horizontal and vertical. The horizontal axis reflects our endless stream of daily activity. On this axis, we do not like surprises; we want control so that we can take care of our responsibilities. The vertical axis, however, is representative of our inner soul and requires deeper reflection. At the intersection of these axes, we create true meaning in our lives.

The BJ Community Retreat



BJ kids create a banner at the Community Retreat over Memorial Day weekend. See pages 6-7 for story and more photos.

We can use Rodger’s interpretation of Jacob’s ladder as inspiration to transform our High Holy Days experience. Imagine these Days of Awe as a massive ladder with vertical and horizontal axes. On the horizontal axis, we go through the High Holy Days like any other activity on our “to do” list. But on the vertical axis, we let the High Holy Days go through us. By approaching the experience with an open heart and allowing ourselves the possibility of being surprised by our own feelings, we may be like Jacob—astounded when he dreamt about a sacred space and declared, “Certainly, God was here and I didn’t know it!”

The holidays are filled with Torah readings, Divrei Torah, beautiful music, and evocative memories. If we consider adding the vertical dimension of Jacob’s dream to our High Holy Days, the experience of Yamim Nora’im will be completely different and more powerful. To do this, we must take time to prepare beforehand, to create a space for Jacob’s ladder to appear in our souls. This means listening to the music of the Yamim Nora’im, reading books, and asking ourselves meaningful questions about ayekah, where we are spiritually in our lives at this moment. This preparation work is alone, individual and personal.

After we have prepared for the High Holy Days services and are “in the zone,” we can allow ourselves to stay in the liturgy that feels powerful to us, even if the rest of the congregation

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SOCIAL ACTION/SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Place at the Table: Conversation, Support and Community

By Larissa Wohl, Social Action Coordinator, and Jim Melchiorre

On a typical night, you can find ten women gathered around a family-style dinner table, enjoying a light meal. Some are conversing with the volunteers; others are quietly eating their dinner. But all are sitting together. They are guests at the B'nai Jeshurun/Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew (BJ/SPSA) Homeless Shelter, our response to the needs of those without a safe haven.

Homelessness is on the rise in New York City. Since 2002, the number of individuals in city shelters has risen 75 percent, many of whom come from lower-middle class or middle class backgrounds. Finding shelter and resources to end the cycle of homelessness is imperative.

Guests tell us that they feel truly recognized by our volunteers and comfortable in a way that is hard to find at a large city shelter—no small feat to accomplish day after day, week after week.”

For more than 20 years, BJ and the SPSA have opened our doors to provide an intimate and welcoming shelter experience. As a part of the Emergency Shelter Network (ESN), which consists of close to 50 faith communities that supplement and offer an alternative to the city shelter system, we originally served men and women. For the last decade, however, we have provided hospitality to homeless women in need of temporary shelter. We are proud to be one of the strongest shelters in the network, and make it a priority to be open five days a week, year-round, no matter the circumstances or holidays.

Our supportive communities make sure the shelter continues to be a place where women can come to sleep comfortably. It all starts with an organization called Urban Pathways, one of several organizations contracted by the city to refer guests to

shelters in the ESN. At Urban Pathways' Olivieri Drop-In Center for Homeless Adults, located near Penn Station, those in need are assigned a case manager and screened before joining our shelter community to ensure a safe environment for all—guests and volunteers alike. From Olivieri, guests arrive at our shelter by bus each night, and return to Olivieri via the same route in the morning.

Our shelter provides a warm environment for our guests to eat a family-style meal, talk with the volunteers if they'd like, or just relax. Our guests often stay with us up to a year or more, depending on their circumstances. Most of them are waiting to find more permanent housing solutions while working full-time (sometimes multiple jobs), going to school, and/or working with case managers at Olivieri to get back on their feet.

Our guests naturally build community because the group usually stays together for a long period of time at our shelter, with new women coming every couple of months or so as guests find housing or are able to move on. Likewise, we try to provide our services as a reciprocal community that helps each other.

Guests tell us that they feel truly valued by our volunteers and comfortable in a way that is hard to find at a large city shelter—no small feat to accomplish day after day, week after week.

We can only hope that there won't be a need for shelters like ours down the road. In the meantime, we are proud to host our guests at BJ and SPSA, and will continue to

provide dignified shelter for those who are working toward more permanent solutions.

It takes the entire community's participation to maintain the BJ/SPSA Homeless Shelter, and we are always looking for new volunteers to join the effort. For more information on how to get involved, contact Larissa Wohl at lwohl@bj.org, or x272.

A Conversation at the Shelter

The guests and our volunteers build up quite a community among themselves, as four of our shelter guests—JM, LV, DG and EG—discussed in a conversation recorded by co-chair Jim Melchiorre one evening this past summer.



Shelter co-chairs Dava Schub and Jim Melchiorre.

JM: I have been in New York City since February 2012. I'm from a smaller community in Maine, around Portland. I really didn't know New York City very well, and when I lost my apartment, I didn't know what to do. That's one thing that's really great about this shelter. So many volunteers come from such a wide variety of professions and backgrounds. It's been hard because I don't have a college degree, but I've gotten a lot of help on writing resumes and other valuable advice from volunteers.

LV: I've been here about a year. There is a mistaken stereotype of people who are homeless. And the experience is not always the same. Being homeless in June and July is a lot different from being homeless in January, when you are focused 24 hours a day on keeping warm.

DG: I am from Barbados. We say "the Land of the Flying Fish." I have been in the shelter since January. The little things are important. A cup of strong coffee in the morning will always make a volunteer popular among the ladies.

EG: I've been here since October. When I was hit by a car and fractured my arm last winter, one of the shelter volunteers who is a nurse-practitioner helped me read and understand the X-rays. The volunteers also help build our confidence when we are going through a little rough spot.

Our shelter provides a warm environment for our guests to eat a family-style meal, talk with the volunteers if they'd like, or just relax."

JM: Friday and Saturday nights are very hard. On Fridays, we can sometimes get into a shelter way uptown in Inwood or out in Queens. On Saturday, there are only four beds there. If we don't get sent there, it's to another drop-in center to sleep in a chair.

LV: Between that drop-in center and the subway, I'll take the subway.

EG: Or go to a movie. You can switch from theater to theater, five or six different movies. You wear a hat sometimes, sunglasses sometimes, so that you look different in each theater. I did that sometimes when I still had my unemployment. Now the movies are too expensive.

EG: We like it when we sit with the volunteers and we share our lives. Like when you told us about going to Zambia.

LV: Or when we found out Liz and Jonathan are engaged.

EG: Or when the pastor tells us about all the places he's traveled to do weddings.

And the pastor's daughter telling us about her summer job working on boats. We try to form community. I took my food stamps and bought a jar of instant coffee that I carried around so we had some.

DG: When we had a flood after a storm, we all grabbed some cardboard to keep the water from the beds.

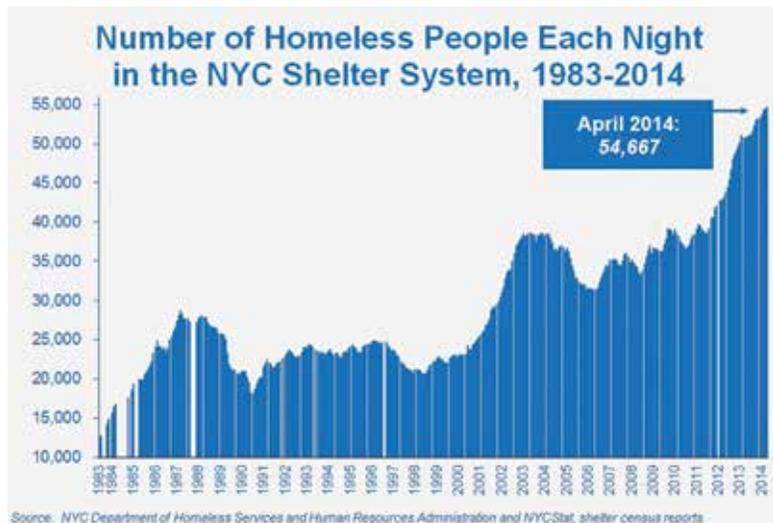
JM: Edmond is a favorite volunteer. He is very formal. He makes us feel like we're eating at an expensive restaurant.

LV: Or the volunteer who buys us ice cream.

JM: And the one who fixes coffee that looks like Frappuccino.

Each spring, in the weeks before Passover, I always ask folks at SPSA to consider a "one-time only" volunteer shift at the shelter to help out our partners at BJ, and those who offer inevitably contact me later wanting to volunteer again. And it's usually because of dinner conversations like this one, the human connection to our guests, and the sense of community. Can you join us?

Jim Melchiorre, a member of SPSA and shelter co-chair, has been a shelter volunteer for 15 years. He is a journalist, video producer, and licensed ESL teacher. He and Cheryl Allen Melchiorre are the parents of three young adult sons. ■



Who Runs Our Shelter?

Over 150 wonderful volunteers from BJ, SPSA, West Park Presbyterian (another smaller church on the Upper West Side) and many other volunteers with no religious affiliation devote their time to our shelter and our guests.

The volunteers are overseen by a supportive and creative leadership team that allows us to provide hospitality with dignity to our guests. This shelter leadership team includes three co-chairs—BJ members Victoria Sutton* and Dava Schub, and SPSA member Jim Melchiorre; five nightly coordinators—Elizabeth Kierstead, Marian Berelowitz, Tamar Weinrich, Michael Glass and Ayal Glezer; food donor coordinator Helen Hanan; and Susan Salwen, who places additional food orders for our shelter.

*In August, Victoria concluded her time as one of our co-chairs after many years of volunteer service with the shelter. She now lives in California with her husband.

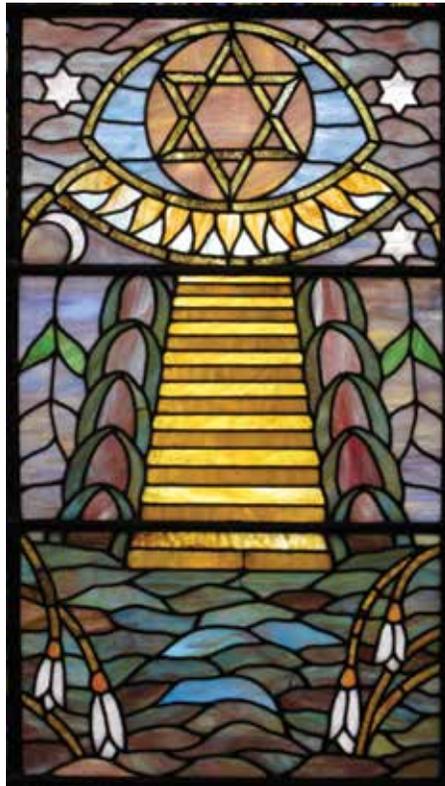
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BY RABBI MARCELO R. BRONSTEIN (continued from page 1)

continues to sing. Don't skip to the next page or prayer. If a strong feeling arises, use the singing of the congregation as a support to go deeper. What does that particular prayer evoke? Why is the emotion so strong?

The emotions we experience from the liturgy are like the feelings we experience in our dreams. These emotions can unlock the invisible armor we may have constructed and tell us something about ourselves. We can close our eyes and allow the music of Kol Nidre to go through us. It is okay to be moved by, or to struggle with, the frightening questions presented in the dramatic Unetaneh Tokef poem, read during the Musaf service. Maybe the Akedah, the story of the binding of Isaac, will bring up heavy emotions about our relationships with our parents and children. During Yizkor, don't be afraid of seeing images or hearing unfinished conversations with loved ones. Any moment of the High Holy Days services can become an opening for the vertical axis to manifest. Stay within these moments as long as needed to move through the emotions.

This reservoir of feelings is connected to our shoshon neshama (the root of our souls). We have a chance at personal liberation by being in touch with our vulnerabilities and the true voice inside of us. It is okay to get lost in this inner world. We, the prayer leaders, will ensure that services are containers for the experience of the vertical axis to happen in a safe, spiritual place. When we are ready, the community will welcome us back. This is what we do for each other when we pray together. When we do return to the prayer book, we will do it from a much deeper place that, in turn, helps us to support others on their journeys.



Above: The stained glass window from the west wall of the 88th Street Sanctuary, depicting Jacob's ladder as golden steps.

The prayer book and the communal service are for each of us what the rock was for Jacob during his dream experience: a reliable, comforting touchstone that supports and connects us to the real world. In another dream, after wrestling with his shoshon neshama, Jacob awakens and in many ways is born anew. He is blessed by an angel who changes his name to Israel, a reflection not only of his struggle and transformation, but his new clear vision for leading the community.

The emotions we experience from the liturgy are like the feelings we experience in our dreams. These emotions can unlock the invisible armor we may have constructed and tell us something about ourselves.”

Struggle is always about the possibility of change—that is what teshuvah (repentance) really means—and true prayer is an invitation for transformation. Tefillah, as Abraham Joshua Heschel said, is a risky activity if we let it go inside of us. Risky, but with great rewards at the end.

Our lives can be a rat race, handling one responsibility after another, going from task to task. If we approach the High Holy Days with the same “check off” mindset, without recognizing the magical opportunities this precious time brings to the soul, it is truly a missed chance to awaken our inner selves. The vertical axis doesn't happen by chance. It is a mindset that takes dedication, intentional meditation and preparation.

I am inviting all of us to approach these High Holy Days on both the horizontal and vertical axes, to not only go through them but to also let them truly go through us. Let's use our ladders to go deeper and higher—to the place of our emotional and spiritual reservoir, and also to the place of our aspirations. Somewhere in the middle is the place where the possibility of teshuvah waits for all of us.

Shanah Tovah. ■

Tzedakah, Tefillah and Teens: Digging Deeper on the Teen Service Trip

By Heila Precel and Josh Adamson

On the surface, teens and prayer do not seem like natural partners. If you were able to witness the 23 teens on BJ's February service learning trip to the Dominican Republic, however, your mind may have changed. As part of the trip, our teens considered tefillah in phenomenal and unique ways, evaluating how prayer may be incorporated into their daily lives. Two of our teens have written about their experiences below.

—Ivy Schreiber,

Director of Education for Youth and Family

Heila's Story

The first time I ever really connected to prayer was on a sticky day in the Dominican Republic (DR). We were sitting in a circle on rickety chairs, alternating between traditional and very non-traditional tefillot. Instead of following the liturgy, we were encouraged to focus on a single tefillah

and make it personally relevant. Instead of listening to others chant around us, we filled the air with our own voices. And most importantly, each of us took turns coming up with a kavanah to share with the group. Prayer in the DR was passionate, it was moving, and it was about accepting a level of intimacy with the people around you that let you drown yourself in the moment.

But while prayer in the DR encapsulated what I loved most about the trip, it also brought out my biggest struggle. At its core, the time we spent in the Dominican Republic was volunteer tourism. We, a group of American teens, wanted to do something good on our February break. So we flew to another country, made a difference, and then went right back to our ordinary lives. I don't mean to belittle

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the work that we did there—it was hard work, and we accomplished a lot. But at the end of the day, we were sweaty teens unused to physical labor that helped out at a community center for a week. I spent a lot of time feeling disrespectful because my experience of the trip revolved around self-reflection. I felt like I was ignoring the fact that the people we tried to help couldn't just hop on a plane to get away from their real lives and struggles. Although I was deeply moved by prayer on the Dominican Republic trip, for this reason, I'm not sure I want to let myself be moved by it. I wish I could say that by the end of the trip I came to a life-changing conclusion—one that let me reconcile those two parts—but I didn't. I have accepted that such a conclusion can never truly be reached.

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Left: Heila Precel and a girl from the Dominican Republic village visited by BJ teens. Above: At the entrance to Cuevas de Maravillas during an afternoon of sightseeing. Left to right: Eli Dubois, Ben Korman, Mica Bahn, Amelia Geser, Ethan Geismar, Rachel Fischer, Cassandra Kopans Johnson, Heila Precel, Maddie Bender, Sam Harris and Josh Adamson.

BJ RETREATS

Our Little Shul in the Woods: The BJ Community Retreat

By Susan Bodnar

On Memorial Day weekend, nearly one hundred BJ members, Marcelo, Roly and guest teacher Nigel Savage, Director and Founder of Hazon, decamped to the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center. The long drive brought us home to the woods, surrounded by farmlands, alongside a tranquil lake. When everyone gathered to light Shabbat candles, the glow of flickering wicks lit our faces as the rose hues of a fading day enclosed us within each other's hearts.

“We prayed together, each one in dialogue with his or her private Torah as we encountered the text. We acknowledged the simchas, new steps and memories among us.”

We prayed, listening to the swish of trees and the occasional goose honking as it skidded onto the water. We ate delicious home-cooked meals. We got to know each other, intimacy aided by a game, a shot or two of good scotch, or the comfortable couches where conversation could linger. We slept to the rhythm of gentle raindrops, and awoke to a misty fog that gave way to spots of sunshine.

We prayed together, each one in dialogue with his or her private Torah as we encountered the text. We acknowledged the simchas, new steps and memories among us. Matt Turk's music lifted our meditations. The blustery wind of a rainstorm coming to an end carried the sound of our service through the windows of our little shul, out to the woods and into the homes of birds, rabbits and raccoons who might have thought themselves part of us.

The retreat offered opportunities for learning. Nigel, as a teacher among and not above us, coaxed exploration of our relationship to food as Jews—the choices we make and what they mean. He taught us that how we eat might be considered as central to our lives as how we pray.

Abutting the frame of Shabbat, we huddled in small groups—at the meal table, on a long hike, on a journey to see the sheep—or in a private tête à tête. We spoke about



our kids, our relationships, our lack of relationships, the new challenges of our maturing selves, and the old struggles of our younger selves. Every once in a while a

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“Are You There, God? It’s Me, _____.” Davening in White: The BJ Women’s Retreat

By Jenn Heettner

Sometimes, B’nai Jeshurun can feel like a very big place—especially for a single woman in her thirties. After joining BJ a year ago, I explored various routes and entry points into the community. Although BJ members are friendly, warm and open, navigating the vastness of our congregation and finding a personal niche can require initiative and openness on behalf of the joiner.

After asking Felicia for guidance, I accepted her recommendation to attend the annual BJ Women’s Retreat. It seemed like a good fit: about 65 attendees; a beautiful setting outside the city; and an opportunity to explore my spirituality in a safe and unassuming way. “I can do this,” I remember thinking. “Even though I don’t know anyone going on the retreat. Really, I can.”

As I packed and prepared on the eve of the retreat, I reflected on this new way of connecting with the BJ community, with my spirituality, and with myself. I looked forward to this weekend away, but I was nervous. Going away with a bunch of women

I didn’t know? I felt like my 11-year-old self on the eve of my first summer at sleepaway camp. Would the women be nice? Would I fit in? Despite years of extensive international business travel to far-flung, difficult environments, a weekend with a group of other Jewish women from New York City seemed by far the most daunting travel possibility I had experienced in a very long time.

But I was excited for a fully immersive Shabbat experience. Shabbat in the city is wonderful, but the city remains ever-present—buzzing with lights and people, blaring horns, and the distractions of urban life. Additionally, those that we welcome Shabbat with at Friday evening services may not be the same people with whom we spend the rest of Shabbat. I looked forward to spending a full Shabbat with a close-knit group.

As I finished packing and dutifully did my pre-trip “homework”—including looking at God’s various names, how they translate, and what that may mean—I thought

...The people I welcomed Shabbat with would also be people who would engage with one another with openness, kindness and vulnerability, imbuing every activity and discussion with warmth, community and a sense of diverse Jewish identity.”

about what God meant to me. The theme of the retreat, “Are You There, God? It’s Me, _____,” was designed to explore conceptualizations of God and spirituality and how they fit into our lives. With no idea of what to expect at the retreat, I was nervous. But the content was interesting and exciting and, of course, Felicia and Sarit would be there to guide us.

What I could not have imagined was that less than 48 hours later the anxiousness would be gone; that the people I welcomed Shabbat with would also be people who would engage with one another with openness, kindness and vulnerability, imbuing every activity and discussion with warmth, community and a sense of diverse

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Our Little Shul in the Woods (continued from page 6)

couple of kids charged in, eager to explore a hike at night, the other side of the lake, the animals in the barn.

After an uplifting havdalah, the sky cleared. We gathered for a bonfire with the music of least four guitarists, one trumpeter and multiple percussionists. Singing in Hebrew, English and Spanish, including modern melodies, old ones, folk, blues, rock, and the obligatory Guantanamo, many voices became one song—in more ways than one.

Susan Bodnar has been a BJ member since 1990. She is a psychologist who, among other endeavors, explores how environmental issues interact with people’s overall psychological development. She and her husband, David, and their children, Ronen and Binah, are always seeking new ways to live sustainably in their urban context. ■



SIMHAT TORAH HONOREES

The Bride and Grooms of BJ: Introducing the Simhat Torah Kallah and Hatanim 5775

By Susan Fishman and Robert Pollack

Every year, BJ rabbis single out deserving congregation members to bestow the honor of reading Torah during our Simhat Torah celebration. This year, the blessing of Simhat Torah hatan (groom) and kallah (bride) has been given to three wonderful members of our community.

Shira Nadich Levin will be our Kallah Torah, and will read the last chapter of the Torah on Simhat Torah morning. Ronen Schatsky and Sasha Chanko will be our Hatanim Bereshit, and will join together to read the first chapter of the Torah as we start the cycle once again.

Mazal tov to our 5775 honorees!

About our Kallah Torah, Shira Nadich Levin



As the daughter of Rabbi Judah and Martha Hadassah Ribalow Nadich at Park Avenue Synagogue, Shira has always lived a vibrant Jewish life. Fourteen years ago, Shira, her husband,

James Loren Levin (the chief operating officer of the Columbia/Barnard Hillel), and their sons Alex, Gideon and Ben became members of BJ. They were thrilled in 2013 when Sara and Ben were married, and Sara joined the family.

Shira is a real estate partner at Cooley LLP, and is co-chair of the Real Estate Leasing Group and chair of the Cooley Women's Initiative. She is a member of the East Coast board of WILEF (Women in Law Empowerment Forum) and a trustee of the Alan B. Slifka Foundation.

At BJ, Shira co-chairs the Minyan committee (first with Irv Rosenthal and now with Peggy Moss), attending regularly, leading services as a shaliach tzibur (prayer leader), and

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working hard to improve the vibrancy and connectivity for those attending minyan. She is also a dedicated volunteer and participant, working on community building initiatives at BJ and regularly attending and hosting BJ classes.

A valuable connector in the Jewish community, Shira served as president of The Abraham Joshua Heschel School, has served on the boards of other organizations, and is actively engaged in pro-bono work with numerous Jewish organizations.

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About our Hatanim Bereshit, Ronen Shatsky and Sasha Chanko

This year, the honor of Hatan Bereshit goes to two young men who, despite their young age, have given much to BJ throughout their lives. Though they are both only now beginning the arduous and tricky journey from home to college as they enter the senior classes at Trinity School and the Heschel School respectively, their lives at BJ—where they have been intertwined since infancy—have much to teach us all.

Ronen Shatsky



A senior at Trinity School, Ronen has been a member of BJ all his life. A gifted musician, Ronen is a singer, an accomplished trumpet player and a pianist.

To Ronen, the singing of Torah is not just a traditional trope; it is beautiful music. He is deeply grateful that BJ's nusach includes many melodies from Jewish communities around the world. Ronen is both honored to be chosen as a Hatan Bereshit, and thrilled to share this aliyah with his lifelong friend, Sasha.

Sasha Chanko



A senior at the Heschel School, Sasha has also been a BJ member since infancy. A dedicated Jewish scholar since his days at Chabad Preschool and

Beit Rabban, Sasha also studies engineering and writing. Sasha enjoys engaging with Jewish text and practice, asking difficult questions to deepen their meaning in a modern context. He is excited to share his commitment to the community as a Hatan Bereshit, particularly since he gets to do so with Ronen.

Susan Fishman has been a member of BJ since 2004. A real estate broker with Douglas Elliman, Susan was a founding member of Tze'irim and the former co-chair of the Membership committee. She is also a gabbai at Jazz at Lincoln Center for the High Holy Days.

Robert Pollack and his wife, Amy, have been members of BJ since 1994. He's a professor of biological sciences at Columbia University, as well as the director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion at Columbia. Bob also serves as assistant gabbai to Freddy Goldstein on the High Holy Days.

Susan Fishman and Robert Pollack, 2013's Simhat Torah Kallah and Hatan, are continuing the BJ tradition of writing about the new year's honorees. ■

Hebrew Immersion, Song and Creative Play: New Young Family Programs for a New Year

By Ivy Schreiber, Director of Education for Youth and Family, and Allison Kapusta, Assistant Director of Education for Early Childhood

at BJ, Jewish identity begins to develop in the earliest years of childhood. Creative programs, such as Bim Bam and Children's Services, provide families with young children regular opportunities to connect with Judaism and with one another.

As we look ahead to the new year, the Youth and Family Education department is gearing up for an expansion of early childhood programming to address the needs of our youngest children and their families. With generous support from the EGL Charitable Foundation, this expansion will build upon the success of our existing programs and provide new pathways into Judaism such as Hebrew immersion, curated play experiences, and new Shabbat and holiday opportunities.

This year, BJ will offer multiple Hebrew immersion experiences for young children including KesheTOT, an Israeli song session led by the talented musician and educator, Shira Averbuch. We are also planning to offer a weekday morning Hebrew language program, as well as an after school session for BJ's school-age children who are interested in expanding their Hebrew skills and vocabulary.

The BJ Hebrew School is partnering with the Jewish Education Project on a pilot project to support Jewish learning for children who attend Harlem Hebrew Charter School, a member of the Hebrew

Charter School Center, supported by the Steinhardt Foundation. Together with these institutions, BJ is developing a pilot program for students in kindergarten through 2nd grade that will enhance and build upon the secular education the children receive in school. For example, a unit for kindergarteners may revolve around learning Hebrew words for a child's morning routine. Later, in the afternoon, children will come to BJ and study the Modeh Ani and Birkat Hashahar, putting their Hebrew learning into a Jewish context.

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Children will continue to explore and discover Shabbat and holidays through BJ's innovative programming, including new PJ Library Havdalah events and holiday experiences. ■

Welcoming Allison Kapusta to YFE



As part of this expansion, we are happy to welcome Allison Kapusta, Assistant Director of Education for Early Childhood, to the team. Allison is originally from Long Island and is a graduate of Binghamton University. She recently completed her MA in Jewish Education at Jewish Theological Seminary. Allison completed her graduate school internship at The Center for Family Life at The JCC in Manhattan where she focused on Shabbat and holiday programs for infants and young children. She spent many summers on staff at Camp Young Judaea Midwest in Wisconsin, and previously worked in education and community engagement at Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in Washington, D.C.

As BJ's first Assistant Director of Education for Early Childhood, Allison supervises our current programs and staff for families with young children, including Bim Bam, PJ Library and Children's Services. Allison has enjoyed getting to know many of BJ's young families, and looks forward to meeting more as she continues to settle into her new role.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Heartfelt Thanks and Sincere Welcome: The Changing of the Board

By Steve Goldberg, Executive Director

a new BJ fiscal year brings fresh faces and inspiring ideas to our Board of Trustees. At the May 30 annual meeting, our community unanimously voted in and welcomed four new board members, as well as a new general counsel (read more about them below). We look forward to their enthusiastic leadership and guidance, particularly during this period when BJ is planning for our future.

At the annual meeting, we also took a moment to give heartfelt thanks to outgoing board members Jonathan Adelsberg, Robert Buxbaum, and Andrew Litt, as well as general counsel Richard Kalikow, for their years of committed, tireless service to BJ. Their hard work has allowed BJ not just to grow, but to flourish. Todah rabah!

Galit Ben-Joseph



Galit Ben-Joseph has been a member of BJ since 2009 and is on the Finance committee. She is an active volunteer and leader with a number of

organizations including Agahozo Shalom, a residential community in rural Rwanda; PJ Library and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation; Gesher, whose mission it is to close the gap between different segments of Israeli society; and the Olivieri Center for Homeless Adults. A Vice President and Wealth Advisor at Neuberger Berman and a Clinical Assistant Professor of Management at Yeshiva University's Sy Syms School of Business, Galit previously spent 14 years in wealth management and project management at Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan Chase. Galit lives on the Upper East Side with her husband, Neil, and three children, Rachel, Joshua and Jacob.

Dale Bernstein



Dale Bernstein and her husband have been BJ members since 1996. Dale co-chaired the Marriage Equality Hevra and is a member of the Panim

el Panim Task Force. She also serves on the boards of directors of PFLAG National and Wingspan Arts; is co-chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the President's Council of Cornell Women; and is on the alumni board of Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. The Founder of UnCommon HR, a boutique human resources consulting firm, Dale was previously Executive Vice President and Global Head of Human Resources for NYSE Euronext. Dale lives with her husband, Gary, on the Upper West Side. They have two grown sons, Zack and Max.

Samara Minkin



Samara has been a member of BJ since 2005. She found her way into the BJ community by volunteering in the Judith Bernstein Lunch Program and,

with the exception of a brief interlude when her family moved to Kansas City, Samara has been an active member ever since, co-chairing the Membership and Hesed committees and working on various initiatives, most recently the Night of 100 Dinners. Samara works in contemporary art and has held positions with Elizabeth Levine & Associates, as well as at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, and the Israel Museum. She lives on the Upper West Side with her husband, Trent Gegax, and their twin daughters, Stella and Hattie.

Josh Penzner



Josh Penzner and his family have been BJ members since 2010. Josh is the current chair of BJ's Young Families Committee, which welcomes

the youngest BJ members and their families and helps build long-lasting connections to the larger BJ community. Josh is a Managing Director at BlackRock, responsible for business development and client service for the firm's insurance clients. Josh lives on the Upper East Side with his wife, Julie Penzner, and their two children.

Ellen Corenswet, General Counsel



Ellen Corenswet and her husband, John Morgan, have been BJ members since 1989. Ellen is a partner in the New York office of the law firm of Covington

& Burling LLP and co-chairs the firm's Venture Capital/Emerging Company practice group. Ellen acts as outside general counsel to a number of companies in the life sciences, technology and media industries. She also acts as pro-bono counsel to an international NGO and a tech community-focused non-profit in Queens. Ellen and John have two children, Jake and Brianna, who grew up in the synagogue. Brianna was a Children's Services leader for a number of years. Ellen's BJ involvement has included Hebrew School Advisory Board, children's activities, AIDS Walk coordinator, and High Holy Days services volunteer. ■

Meet Irv Rosenthal, BJ's New President

By Susan Reimer-Torn

As of July 1, and for the next three years, Irvin Rosenthal is adding the responsibilities of President of BJ to the existing demands of his position as Chief Financial Officer of UJA-Federation. Irv brings his thoughtful reserved style, life-long concerns for the well being of the Jewish community, and proven expertise to both posts.

Trained as a lawyer, Irv served as a senior executive at Barneys New York, and then moved to his current position at UJA-Federation. Community service was a paramount value in the small town of Butler, Pennsylvania, where he was raised. Irv and his wife, Ruth Jarmul, came to New York in 1975 in search of a Jewish community with a small town feel. In 1989, they found what they were looking for at BJ.

"BJ was, of course, much smaller then than it is now," Irv recalled. "We had our three daughters, Rebecca, Rachel and Sarah, at a time when there were far fewer families with children. In fact, 80 percent of new members joining BJ at the time were single."

Irv served on the BJ board from 2001-2007, then again during the past two years. When asked why he stepped up to the presidency now, he quietly replied, "BJ has given a great deal to my family and to me. I welcome the opportunity to give back."

When asked about his priorities, Irv emphasized the importance of the ongoing strategic planning process. As his term began, BJ members finished replying to a comprehensive survey that measured their views on a range of issues important to BJ's future. "We had nearly 800 surveys completed, a response rate of almost 30 percent," Irv notes with satisfaction.

When BJ's strategic plan is completed in early 2015, new initiatives will be developed to implement it. "With the help of the survey and a wide-ranging environmental scan undertaken by the Strategic Planning committee, we will have some clear barometers of what matters to the BJ community," said Irv. "We want the results

to take into account members' priorities, the rabbis' vision, and the landscape of the larger Jewish world."

When asked about challenges facing the BJ community, Irv cites the need for better communication. "A huge amount goes on at BJ that most people don't know about unless they're deeply involved," he said. "The issue is not a lack of transparency; we just need more effective communication."



A reconsidered response to intermarriage is another key challenge. "Today, most non-Orthodox Jews have the experience of intermarriage in their families, whether immediate or extended. We need to consider how to better integrate this reality into our community," he noted. "While there are important halakhic questions involved, the rabbis and the community need to work together on this issue."

Irv regrets that Israel, once a unifying force in the Jewish community, has become a divisive one. "These days, if we want to talk about the politics of Israel, we need to learn how to have difficult conversations, and that is something on our agenda," Irv emphasized. "There are many other dimensions where we can strengthen BJ

■ ■ We are not interested in living in a monoculture. Here, who you are and what you contribute to the community will always matter more than what you do for a living."

members' connections to Israel, creating links so that we can learn from our Israeli counterparts and they can learn from us."

When asked what he would consider BJ's unique contributions to a crowded West Side synagogue scene, Irv replies in a well-considered tone, "At BJ, you can come on board wherever you are on your Jewish journey, but we will encourage you and help you to grow. We have authentic rabbis who value the questions as much as, if not more than, the answers. Then there is the music and the fact that we take both prayer and action very seriously."

Irv especially points to BJ's diversity, replying with marked equanimity to the question of whether the transformation of the West Side into an affluent neighborhood and the capital campaign for the Community House will not skew the community's values. "Diversity is our strong suit," Irv replied proudly. "BJ does not emphasize dedication plaques, even though people need to be thanked. We are not interested in living in a monoculture. Here, who you are and what you contribute to the community will always matter more than what you do for a living."

Irv's measured leadership during this time of BJ evolution will doubtless contribute much to our community for many years to come.

Susan Reimer-Torn is the author of the spiritual memoir Maybe Not Such a Good Girl: Reflections on Rupture and Return, available at West Side Judaica and online at www.susanreimertorn.com. She is a freelance journalist as well as a life coach and workshop facilitator. She and her husband Edmond, an art and estates consultant, have been BJ members for 12 years. They are active in the BJ/SPSA Homeless Shelter, Hevra Kadisha, and study groups. Susan is also on the planning committee for the 25th anniversary celebration of Standing Again at Sinai. ■

DEVELOPMENT

Elevating the Souls of Our Loved Ones

By Lisa Steinberg, Director of Development

this year, as every year, I will make gifts in my parents' memory following Yizkor.

For most of us, the High Holy Days are a time to remember, reflect and return to our truest, best selves. The approach of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur always makes me think of my parents, now gone for over 10 years. I think about the holiday table, groaning under the weight of those delicious, special treats we looked forward to every year. No matter how dutifully I follow my mother's recipes, they are never quite as good as my memory of hers.

I think about the annual trips to purchase our holiday garb. It was always a special time for my sisters and me, shopping with our mom to choose just the right outfit, as well as the anticipation of seeing everyone in shul, all dressed up in new clothes for the new year.

I think about when I was really little, feeling very important as I sat next to my dad in shul, playing with his tzitzit and being moved by the tear in his voice when he davened. Even though I did not understand the words, I certainly understood that what he was doing was deeply meaningful to him and it meant something to me that I was right there next to him.

Many families follow the tradition that if your parents are still alive, you don't stay in shul for the Yizkor service.

My parents didn't follow that tradition. They told us that, although we were fortunate enough to still have our parents, we needed to stay and say Yizkor for all of those who had no one to say it for them.

For me, the public and communal memorial service of Yizkor ("Remember" from the root word zakhor) is very different from the experience of observing *yahrzeit* privately. As a child saying the words of the Yizkor prayer, I felt myself to be a link in the chain of my family, my shul, and the larger history of the Jewish people. I am grateful to my parents for giving me the responsibility of memory.

I think about when I was really little, feeling very important as I sat next to my dad in shul, playing with his tzitzit and being moved by the tear in his voice when he davened."

Many years have passed. Now, when I intone the words of Yizkor, my thoughts turn to my beloved parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and others who have been lost. I am proud to have become the person they wanted me to be, the person I want to be, connected to my heritage and honored by my responsibility to be charitable in their names.

Reciting Yizkor, we say, "In loving testimony to their lives, I pledge charity to help perpetuate ideals important to them. Through such deeds, and through prayer and memory, are their souls bound up in the bond of life."

By giving charity, we make a positive change in this world on their behalf and keep their spirits and names alive.

I know that my parents would have been very proud of the work I am honored to do for the B'nai Jeshurun community. And I know that my gift to BJ in my parents' memory will elevate their souls. I hope you will consider honoring the memory of your loved ones with a gift to BJ, too. ■



Lisa Steinberg's parents, Raymond and Doris Shatz.



In downtown Santo Domingo during another afternoon of sightseeing. Top row, left to right: Rachel Bass, Rachel Fischer, Amelia Geser, Eli DuBois, Mica Bahn, Amelia Sylvor-Greenberg, Isaac Santelli, Sam Harris, Lily Haninovich, Alex Baren, Ethan Geismar, David Lieberman (BJ staff), Josh Adamson, Adam Kern, Alexa Ringer, Ayala Wasser (BJ staff), Josh Nodigff, Alex Braver (BJ Rabbinic Fellow). Bottom row, left to right: Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein, Jonah Klausner, Cassandra Kopans Johnson, Maddie Bender, Michael Model, Noah Skolnick, Danny Golden, Heila Precel, Ben Korman.

Tzedakah, Tefillah and Teens (continued from page 5)

Yet, the work still needs to be done. So even though fighting between feelings of shame and fulfillment was difficult and uncomfortable, I wouldn't take back any of my experiences in the Dominican Republic. Instead, I hope I can learn to strike a better balance by using the hesed and prayer that I learned during my weeklong stay.

Heila Precel has been attending services at BJ for as long as she can remember, and became a bat mitzvah at BJ in December 2008. She is a senior at the A.J. Heschel School, and is passionate about both science and visual arts.

Josh's Story

I've always loved to sing niggunim, the songs that always start BJ services. They usually

have repetitive sounds and don't have actual words. If you don't know what niggunim are, then they must sound terrible from this description, but trust me—they are great. During the international trip, I would always start one up, on the bus, at work, or at dinner. Sometimes people would join me, but it would never be the whole group.

On service learning trips, Shabbat is a day of rest, reflection and prayer. No work is done; instead, we all think. Shabbat starts with the Friday night service. The week we spent in the Dominican Republic was the most intense week of my life. We worked in the hot sun for hours, lived without 24/7 water or electricity, and saw poverty. By the time of the service, we were done with work for the trip, and only Shabbat lay ahead of

us. At the end of the service, Rabbi Marcelo started a niggun. It started off slow, but then gained strength until everyone was singing. But that wasn't enough; there was still more energy that could be put into the niggun. So I stood up. And then Marcelo stood up, and then David Lieberman stood up, and then everybody stood up. People were clapping, smiling and singing. Then, Marcelo started to do a circle dance with little kicks. Soon we were all dancing. It was the most powerful moment of the entire trip for me, and one I will remember for the rest of my life.

Josh Adamson is a junior at Columbia Prep. He became a bar mitzvah at BJ in 2011, and has been part of the teen community ever since. He plays baseball and likes history. ■

Davening in White: The BJ Women's Retreat (continued from page 7)

Jewish identity. And that, by the end, I would feel such a connectivity and closeness to these women.

While I cannot speak for anyone else on the trip, it certainly seemed that many of us gained exponentially more than we individually contributed. Indeed, the whole was so much greater than the sum of its parts.

The arc of the weekend's itinerary was, of course, Shabbat. Shabbat gave us the time structure for prayer, reflection and rest. The retreat center, nestled in the verdant Berkshires, provided the inspiring space to immerse ourselves in Shabbat. The participants brought voices, experience and energy to fill the space with song, prayer, ideas and reflections. Services were held in a beautiful little chapel with walls of windows looking out on the lushness of the forest, as well as on a patio overlooking the cool calmness of a lake. And we all wore white, which took on a very special feeling of being clad in gentle, fresh light as we davened and sang together.

Meals took place in the very traditional and rustic camp dining room and consisted of excellent food, grown and freshly harvested from the Adamah Farm at Isabella Freedman. During breaks, we enjoyed the trappings of summer camp: sunning on the dock; swimming in the lake; reading a book under a tree; going for walks in the woods; and singing songs by the campfire with Felicia on guitar—all complimented by the sweet scent of roasted marshmallows and s'mores.

But it was the space in-between, where discussions and explorations of ideas about divinity, spirituality and God took place, which was the most remarkable. We had many conversations—in large groups, small groups, and in pairs—about the opportunities and challenges for connecting with God, all of which required openness and vulnerability. During study sessions, we read and reflected on different passages and how the various

names and concepts of man and God shift. For example, given the different names of God that we find in the Torah, how do we relate to each one? Which names do we connect with more deeply, and which make

grown woman, seeking and finding spiritual exploration amid my community of wonderful Jewish women. I am so very grateful for Felicia, Sarit, Beth and all the BJ women who created such an incredible weekend.



us feel more distant from God? Could we, in small groups, come up with our favorite and identify why it spoke to us? Or in another example, in a prayer where we refer to God, what happens if we use a female pronoun instead of a male pronoun? If I refer to God as a "she" or an "it," how does that impact feelings of connection to the divine? Does it impact me at all? It's a wonderful exercise anyone may practice while reciting prayers. Is there a difference? Or is it a case of "just words?"

For me, the Women's Retreat was by far one of the most connected times I have ever felt, not only as a new BJ member, but as a Jew. By the end of the weekend, I was no longer a nervous young girl at camp. I was a

Jennifer Heettner recently joined BJ. A New York native, Jennifer has worked and lived internationally and is interested in global Jewish communities, culture and history. Jennifer is the Director of Global Program Information, Monitoring and Evaluation at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). Prior to joining JDC, she worked domestically and abroad on good governance, transparency and citizen participation, as well as on disability issues and gender-based violence prevention. An avid traveler, Jennifer enjoys local Shabbat experiences whenever possible. She is a dedicated cyclist and loves to cook, write and take photographs. ■

Above: Linda Kates and Susan Margolis.

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Designer: Harriet R. Goren

Mazal Tov

To the following members and their families on their B'nai Mitzvah (July, August, September):

Dani Apple	Eve Brunswick	Michele Garten
Arielle Geismar	Gillian Feinglass	Jacob Katz
	Theodore Strauss	

To the following members and their families (through August 1):

- Fretta Reitzes on the marriage of her son, Tim Reitzes, to Robyn Delman.
- Susan Reimer-Torn on the recent publication of her book, *Maybe Not Such a Good Girl: Reflections on Rupture and Return*.
- John Ruskey on his 15 years of service as Executive Vice President and CEO of UJA-Federation.
- Rachel Brook and Matt Holman on the birth of their daughter, Lila Ezri Brook-Holman.
- Cara Unowsky and David Glickman on their wedding.
- Judith and Carl Felsenfeld on the marriage of their granddaughter, Sierra Frost, to Alex Haager.
- Judith and Robert Safran on the marriage of their son, Matthew Safran, to Maren Gest.
- Beth and Arthur Belkin on the upcoming marriage of their son, Jonah Belkin, to Ilana Halpern.
- Benjamin Ross, Liz Bennett and Reuven Bennett Ross on the birth of their son and brother, Ezekiel Gus Bennett Ross.
- Joel and Sandy Soffin on the birth of their granddaughter, Esme Frances Berrol Soffin.
- Suzanne Lipkin and Richard Exelbert on their wedding.
- Marcy and Bennett Grau on the marriage of their daughter, Shara Grau, to Alex Ladyzhensky. We also extend a mazal tov to Shara's brothers, Jonathan and Aaron Grau.
- Elisheva Hirshman Finston and Steve Finston on the birth of their son, Zachary Dalton Finston. We also extend a mazal tov to his grandmother, Debby Hirshman.
- Allison Weinger Miniati and Filippo Miniati on the naming of their twins, Emma Hanna Miniati and Luca Alexander Miniati. We also extend a mazal tov to the twins' grandmother, Lilli Platt, and aunt, Emily Weinger.
- Lilli Platt, Allison Weinger Miniati, and Emily Weinger on the naming of their granddaughter and niece, Hannah Loren Weinger.



Condolences (through August 1)

The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the death of our members:

- Sherwood Newman, and we extend our sincere condolences to his wife Sallie Newman, their daughter Andrea Newman, and their entire family.
- Marion Berman, and we extend our sincere condolences to her daughter Jennifer Berman, her granddaughter Julia Leffler, and their entire family.
- Rhoda Glass, and we extend our sincere condolences to her daughter and son-in-law, Susan and Edward Naylor, and their entire family.

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

- Hank, Sonia and Andrew Orenstein on the death of Hank's father, Walter Orenstein.
- Esther Kogan, Ruben Niesvizky, Itamar and Tanya Niesvizky-Kogan on the death of Esther's father, Noma Kogan.
- Miriam, Jon and Jacob Kose on the death of Miriam's father, Harold Kaufman.
- Shari Freedman and her daughter, Rachel Freedman, on the death of Shari's mother, Sallie Freedman.
- Chuck Gold, Anne Kohn, Sami and Jake Gold, on the death of Chuck's father, Melvin Gold.
- Richard Revesz, Vicki Been, Joshua and Sarah Revesz on the death of Richard's mother, Nora Revesz.
- Peter Bokor, Jeannie Blaustein, Sophie and Livia Bokor on the death of Peter's brother, Bruce Stephen Bokor.
- David and Deborah Rasiel on the death of David's father, Amram Rasiel.
- Dennis Adler and Robin Aronow on the death of Dennis' father, Eric Adler.
- Debbie Biegelson Wechsler and Ron Wechsler, and their children Jordan, Bennett and Rachel Wechsler, on the death of Debbie's mother, Jean Biegelson.
- Millie Waldman, Matthew Fried, and Gabrielle Waldman-Fried on the death of Millie's mother, Esther Waldman.
- Tovah Feldshuh-Levy and Andrew Levy on the death of Tovah's mother, Lillian Kaplan Feldshuh.
- Svetlana, Alon, Rachel and Emma Bochman on the death of Svetlana's grandfather, Ilya Galperin.
- Paul Samuels and Nurit Margulies on the death of Paul's father, Allen Samuels.
- Bart, Anne and Hannah Teush on the death of Bart's mother, Evelyn Teush.
- Eileen Weiss on the death of her mother, Helen Weiss.
- Este Osofsky-McGonigle, Raymond McGonigle, and Zachary McGonigle on the death of Este's father, Jacob Osofsky.

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