

Towards a More Inclusive Judaism: Bridging the Distance

BY RABBI FELICIA L. SOL

“I had been raised to believe I could be anything I wanted to be, and yet I saw no one on the bimah who looked like me.”

A Visit with Kitah Gan and Kitah Aleph

See the full story on page 8



Kitah Gan and Kitah Aleph visit Rabbi Marcelo and the 88th Street sanctuary.

I can trace my choice *not* to go to rabbinical school to a very particular moment in time. Rabbi Matthew Cutler was driving me home from a youth group retreat where I had been the songleader. As a senior in college, I was sharing my questions about my next steps. Should I become a Jewish educator or a rabbi? Rabbi Cutler asked, “Do you believe in God?” I feared the question. I felt incompetent to answer it, and I had never done any serious exploration of what I believed. At that moment, I decided to apply for a master’s degree in Jewish Education and pursue my commitment to the Jewish community, but retreat from the idea of becoming a rabbi.

During the first year of my master’s program in Jerusalem, I did a lot of reflecting on why I was so ambivalent about the rabbinate—even as I had a deep sense of calling to pray and study Torah, to create and support community, and to serve the Jewish people. After much thinking, I realized that, beyond my questions of belief in God, I had grown up in an egalitarian, liberal Jewish community. I had been raised to believe I could be anything I wanted to be, and yet I saw no one on the bimah who looked like me. It wasn’t that I thought I couldn’t be a rabbi. Intellectually, I knew I could, but my own sense of seeing myself on the pulpit was blocked by the lack of women role models before me. Obviously, you know the rest of the story—I became a rabbi—but what bridged the distance?

In that year of living in Israel—studying, reflecting and immersing myself in it all—I became aware that I had a deep sense of calling to be a rabbi. Though I had fears and reservations, I increasingly felt that I should walk right towards them, not run away from them. I came to realize that, instead of having a critique of the rabbinate from the outside, I could choose to become a rabbi in my own image. I decided I would become the kind of rabbi that felt consonant with who I was and what I believed God was asking me to be in the world.

Fast-forward two years: I was studying modern Jewish thought with Rabbi David Ellenson, and we read *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* by Dr. Judith Plaskow. All of a sudden, I had a much larger understanding of what had informed my ambivalence, even suspicion. Although I was deeply engaged as a Jew—a committed member and leader in my synagogue, a long time camper and counselor at Jewish summer camp, a regional leader in New England for my youth group, living in Israel in college—there was something about the patriarchal structure in the stories I studied. The characters in them, the names of God that were utilized, and the people I saw left me subconsciously marginalized. I do not attribute this feeling to any particular act of any rabbi or teacher—just the outcome of thousands of years

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SOCIAL ACTION/SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Year of the Environment

By Larissa Wohl, Social Action Coordinator

from major droughts on the West Coast and extreme weather in Southeast Asia, to record rainfalls on the East Coast and the continued melting of the polar ice caps, the effects of climate change are not only hitting home, but truly affecting the global community.

With a new sense of urgency, leaders and experts are discussing what we need to do to slow down global climate change. In September, Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, convened a special summit with world leaders to discuss climate change, the pending expiration of the Kyoto Protocols (which the United States never signed), and the critical need for new regulations and commitments from the global community. This eventful year has helped us see that this movement can no longer be just one of words; it is and must be a traction-gathering movement of voices, faces, names and stories. We cannot rest until we see new policies and bold regulations, both in the United States and globally, that tangibly reduce CO₂ levels in our atmosphere. Arresting climate change will take nothing less.

Locally, BJ's new Environmental Justice Hevra is calling for reforms to the way commercial waste is managed and collected in the city. Additionally, more than 200 B'nai Jeshurun members publically showed their ongoing, active concern regarding climate change by participating in the People's Climate March. We are excited to continue our work, demanding concrete global and local action on climate change and an economy that works for both people and the planet: a world with good jobs, clean air, and safe communities for everyone. We hope you will consider joining us as we grow our campaign this coming year.

A New BJ Environmental Justice Campaign:

Transform Don't Trash NYC

In response to the growing need for involvement in climate change issues and solutions, Panim el Panim, BJ's community organizing and advocacy

initiative, formed the Environmental Justice Hevra. After several months of uncovering what environmental issues resonate with BJ members, researching potential campaigns, and drafting proposed action plans, the hevra is proud to announce BJ's involvement in the Transform Don't Trash NYC campaign.

BJ was part of the 10,000+ marchers strong Interfaith Contingent, representing over 30 faiths."

For decades, commercial waste in NYC has caused problems for local communities and workers. Each year, our restaurants, offices and businesses produce over 5.5 million tons of commercial waste (excluding construction waste), which is currently picked up by over 4,000 trucks owned by over 230 individual companies. Ninety percent of this commercial waste is recyclable or compostable, but it is estimated that less than 25 percent is being recycled. This staggering amount of waste ends up going to landfills and incinerators, rather than being recycled. Clearly, this is not an environmentally or economically sustainable system.

Aside from the lack of regulation around recycling by commercial waste haulers, the current system is fraught with other problems. First and foremost, the system is inefficient. Hundreds of companies send dirty trucks along crisscrossing routes throughout the city each day, including neighborhoods with high rates of asthma. A single city block may have a different hauler for each business, leading to increased pollution



Top: left and center, BJ members Barry and Mira Schlein. Above: center and right, BJ members Ronda Small and Ira Wolfman.

from truck exhaust and road wear and tear. Low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately affected by solid waste handling because most city waste is transported to transfer facilities in their neighborhoods. It is also getting more expensive to incinerate or ship our waste out to landfills in other states due to limited capacity to accommodate our increasing



Top: BJ member Mark Lehrman blows the shofar at the pre-march interfaith service. Above: Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein proudly holds one of our banners.

Looking to get involved?
Contact Larissa Wohl, Social Action Coordinator, at lwohl@bj.org, or call x272.

encourage much needed private investment in technology and recycling facilities.

BJ member Gil Kulick reflects, "Reforming and rationalizing the commercial garbage collecting system in New York City might seem like an unlikely project for Panim el Panim. In fact, it has many implications for social, economic and environmental justice. Working with the Transform Don't Trash NYC campaign, [the Environmental Justice Hevra's] aim is to greatly reduce that harm by moving the City Council to pass a law that eliminates duplication, reduces pollution, and requires that workers be paid a living wage."

This year, the Environmental Justice Hevra is looking to engage local business owners in conversation regarding current commercial waste conditions and how City Council legislation would have a revolutionary effect on New York City and its waste management practices. It's time to clean up our act and help ensure safe environmental and labor practices for waste haulers and our city.

BJ at the People's Climate March

The People's Climate March exceeded expectations by bringing more than 310,000 people—including 200+ BJ members—to the streets of New York City on Sunday, September 21. A truly historic moment, the public outcry was clear for concrete and immediate action to save our planet and our communities, including economic and environmental policies that work for communities around the world.

BJ was part of the 10,000+ marchers strong Interfaith Contingent, representing over 30 faiths. The interfaith service was powerful, rallying everyone together to sing, pray and raise up our voices with hope for a better

future. With special guest Peter Yarrow from Peter, Paul and Mary, and many faith leaders, we kept active and entertained while waiting for our turn to march.

Several BJ members shared their thoughts about participating in this historic march:

"It was a humid, hot day, something my 10-year-old remarked as fitting! A clarion call. The wonderful thing about going with BJ was seeing rabbis, ministers, Hare Krishnas, monks and imams in total solidarity."

—Janice Horowitz

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"Along with 400,000 marchers, as Heschel said, we 'prayed with our feet' and expressed our faith and concern that the leaders of the global community...will respond to the climate changes that, if not arrested, threaten 'al kol yoshvey level [on all who dwell on earth].'"

—Richard Sussman

• • •

"It was very inspiring to see how many people from such different cultural backgrounds came to the March. It really proved that, in every religion, there will always be some people who care about protecting the Earth."

—Mariel Grosshtern

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"After standing toe-to-toe for over two hours in a packed crowd...with Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary serenading us (talk about flashbacks!), the March began and never seemed to end. It was an inspiration to be part of this movement, and my only hope is that it will be a wake-up call to our government and the world."

—Shelley Stile

• • •

"My wife Pamela and I stood on West 58th Street with hundreds of other BJ members for almost three hours before the March even started, but it was worth every minute. I was very proud to be a BJ member, and I am cautiously optimistic that, as a result of the Climate March, our national and world leaders will do something about climate change before it is too late."

—Les Judd

• • •

"Marching together for the People's Climate March reminded me—as it must have been for many of us there that morning—of marches in the 60s. It mattered then; it matters today when our planet is threatened with an imbalance that could certainly lead to devastating results, many already visible. My

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COMMUNITY

Tashlikh and the Thrill of Potential

By Martha Kate Ginsberg Rosenfeld

Every year, my sister's in-laws announce their big Rosh Hashanah gathering for 4:00PM on the first day of the holiday. They extend their most generous invitation to my mother and me and now, of course, to my husband as well. It's a lovely evening, but it's in Scarsdale. Every year, as we accept the invitation, both my mother and I think wistfully about the one ritual we will be missing: Tashlikh on the Upper West Side.

I grew up in a kosher home, traditional Conservative, observing the rich customs and rituals of the Jewish tradition. We even built a sukkah every year in the backyard. But my family didn't do Tashlikh. I suppose it's because there wasn't really anywhere to go to take part in the customary tossing of bread crumbs into the river, symbolically "casting off" the previous year's sins. We lived in the Midwood section of Brooklyn. The closest body of water was Sheepshead Bay, which wasn't really within walking distance. Plus, we didn't drive on the holidays.



So Tashlikh was new for me when I started coming to BJ. The spiritual activity itself—which, for me, always became a meditation toward self-betterment—was powerful. And, after I'd tossed the last of my bread crumbs and was ready to take that sunset stroll along the Hudson River, I was always amazed and thrilled to find all walks of Upper West Side Jewish life sharing the moment. This is the ultimate Jewish social scene, full of possibility. There are the fresh-out-of-college NYC newbies meeting up with old camp buddies; new parents with their babies in strollers and new grandparents astride; kids running around; small gatherings of friends and congregations. All ages, multiple generations, and undoubtedly someone you knew at some point in your life. For me, it was always about who I would see on that pedestrian path. Who would I run into that might introduce me to someone else that might introduce something else into my life? Granted, I'm a very social being, but

this is the thrill of Tashlikh — the possibility that some fresh new energy would be injected into my life: a ski trip, a date, a new job idea, a book club, a band, a painting class, a biking buddy. In fact, I found each of these at one point or another, stemming from a chance meeting during Tashlikh.

Tashlikh has come and gone, but if we can treat Shabbat services and the BJ events we attend throughout the year as opportunities to connect with someone new and see things with fresh eyes, the possibilities are endless. There are over 100 new members at B'nai Jeshurun, each bringing with them new energy and fresh ideas. And in an already thriving congregation of over 1,600 members, the potential for new connections and perspectives for each of us individually and for the congregation as a whole is astounding.

Martha Kate Ginsberg Rosenfeld started attending BJ Friday night services in 1991 and became a member a few years later. She has volunteered with the homeless shelter and on various committees. She is currently Co-Chair of the Membership Committee. ■

The Year of the Environment (continued from page 3)

hope is that we will translate those footsteps into meaningful daily actions.”

—Myriam Abramowicz



“I was proud to be there as a part of BJ, marching along with our clergy.”

—Rochelle Friedlich



“The March was the human spirit in action, and what could be better than that?”

—Jenny Golub



“Every Rosh Hashanah during Musaf, during the ecstatic moments when we sing Psalm 150 while three shofars are blowing, I have a vision so beautiful it makes me cry: all kinds of people together—men, women and children, regardless of religion or ethnicity or the other things that divide us, people who may have even once been enemies—holding hands and dancing through the streets of Jerusalem and the world. The coming of the Messianic era? Maybe. All I know is that when 310,000 people in New York City gathered to save and heal the planet, and those of us up front were singing Psalm 150 to 100 shofars blowing, I had my first experience of my vision becoming real.”



—Joy Fleisig

“What I found most profound about the March was the commitment to make an impact on world leaders, to have them recognize that climate change is real and must be considered a top policy priority. Marching to the chant, ‘this is what democracy looks like,’ I felt like I was making history. Not only did it remind me of the days of protest against social injustices when I was young, but it took protest to a new level for a new era around an entirely unprecedented set of challenges.”

—Renee Cherow-O’Leary ■

Night of 100 Dinners: Let's Honor the Hospitality Legacy of Sara and Andy Litt

By Robin Fleischner

Like the avant-garde Parisian salon of Gertrude Stein where modern art was discovered and nurtured, Andy and Sara Litt's living room was an incubator and haven for BJ. As they entered, guests could count on a good bottle of wine to spark imagination, celebrate friendship and community, or lend comfort. Protecting the delicious food from their mischievous black and white springer spaniel, Pepper, could be difficult, but she added levity to intense discussions with the rabbis about governance and other issues facing BJ.

Through their generous, warm hospitality, the Litts helped us understand the meaning of Shabbat, tzedakah and acts of loving kindness. Before Sara and Andy moved from the city and BJ returned to our Community House, the Litts' home was an essential part of the BJ campus as they hosted countless Hebrew School Shabbat dinners, holiday cocktail parties, and Executive Committee meetings. Many of the ideas which we now consider essential elements of our mission—most notably BJ's commitment to liberal Judaism throughout the United

States and Israel—were hatched in Sara and Andy's living room.

Although they eschew the limelight, Sara and Andy have a unique gift for bringing people together and making the large BJ community feel more intimate. Many credit the Litts with introducing them to their closest friends at BJ. During a discussion at the first BJ Women's Retreat about a moment of feeling holy, former BJ President Sara could not articulate one particular instance. Her *hevruta* partner responded that was because "...[Sara] is so humble about being a *tzadeket*." As for Andy, an exceptional, compassionate physician, he often appears "heaven sent" at a BJ member's side in the hospital to offer comfort and encouragement.

Laughter and social action go hand-in-hand at the Litt home, as they organized and hosted American Jewish World Service programs, call centers during critical political campaigns, an introduction to Israel Encounter, and other impactful events.

What could be a better way to honor the Litts and celebrate their extraordinary



legacy of hospitality leading to action than hosting fellow BJ members during the Night of 100 Dinners on January 10? Let's share friendship, laughter, good wine and community as we have done so often with Sara and Andy.

Robin Fleischner is a former Vice President on the BJ board and an attorney whose boutique law practice is dedicated to forming families through adoption, surrogacy and assisted reproduction. ■

NIGHT OF 100 DINNERS

JANUARY 10, 2015

Visit www.bj100dinners.org to register

Host a Dinner, Attend a Dinner,
Dance the Night Away

Enjoy a special evening with friends,
support BJ and honor
Sara and Andy Litt

with this year's Spirit of B'nai Jeshurun Award.

Can't attend dinner? Join us at the
dance party or buy a raffle ticket.

Towards a More Inclusive Judaism: Bridging the Distance

BY RABBI FELICIA L. SOL (continued from page 1)

of patriarchal tradition and a society that rendered more power, authority and status to men. While I was so drawn into the Jewish tradition, its practices, and the Jewish communities I was blessed to be a part of, something was also telling me I didn't belong. *Standing Again at Sinai* gave me language to articulate my desire for an embrace of "my Torah" as a woman: a breakdown of the power structure, different language, and metaphors to name God. Its critique of the patriarchal tradition also created a possibility and demand for renewal and restoration—not just for the sake of women, but for the sake of everyone. God, too.

Twenty-five years later, an enormous amount has changed in Jewish life and the larger society around us. More than half of the students in liberal rabbinical schools are women. Prayer language has expanded and changed to reflect more feminine images of God, as well as more language of an imminent God and less the one of "the man

on a large throne in the heavens." Creative Jewish ritual has emerged to respond to, celebrate and support moments in life that Jewish tradition did not honor previously, from *simhat bat* (ceremonies for baby girls); to prayers and rituals for miscarriage, divorce, the arrival of a girl's first period, and menopause; to the creation of Rosh Hodesh women's and girls' groups to mark the coming of a new Hebrew month and the potential for renewal.

There is much to celebrate. Not only for the fuller inclusion of women into Jewish life, but also for the pathways towards an expression of Jewish life that, in many ways, were birthed through the Jewish feminist and at-large feminist movements. It is likely that the more expansive ways spirituality is being experienced in Jewish life—meditation, yoga, more affective learning, healing services—must give credit to the breakthroughs made by Dr. Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai* and many other leaders who paved the path

for a Judaism that is more inclusive, just, expansive and open.

I am profoundly grateful to Rabbi Matthew Cutler, who asked me the right question at the right time that sent me on a path of discovery. I am also indebted to the Torah of Dr. Plaskow for giving me the language of critique, inspiration to open up new pathways in the search to live out my calling as a rabbi, and for the blessings of creativity and justice that emerged with her book, from which we all reap the benefits.

SAVE THE DATES: "Meet Me at Sinai"

Mark your calendar for this two-part event at BJ: **Tuesday, January 20**, *Standing Again at Sinai* book discussion with Dr. Judith Plaskow and **Sunday, February 8**, "Meet Me at Sinai" day of learning with a roster of dynamic speakers. The first 20 members who sign up for the book discussion will receive a free book, generously provided by Dr. Plaskow. Contact Jo at jicaza@bj.org or x241. ■

ELEH EZKERAH

"These I Recall": Eleh Ezkerah 5775

By Stephanie Berger, Director of Marketing and Communications

no matter how many Holocaust stories we hear, each one offers a unique view into the tragic time leading up to, during, and immediately following World War II. At this year's Yom Kippur Musaf service, BJ members Barry Lichtenberg, Leslie Nelson and Shira Nadich Levin and Jimmy Levin recounted their relatives' stories during the Shoah.

Les shared the story of his parents, George and Julia Nelson, and grandmother, Ethel Greengold, all of whom survived the Shoah. Their lives, which began in conventional ways during the first third of the 20th century in Europe, became remarkable sagas of perseverance, strength, hope, faith and survival.

Days after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, Barry's father, Zevulun Lichtenberg—then 19 years old—walked out alone from his family's Warsaw home

in what would become an uncanny flight to freedom. Carrying only a rucksack, a couple of zloty, and two buttered rolls, he headed east without knowing what was to become of him or the family he left behind, whom he never saw again.

Rabbi Judah Nadich, Shira's father and her husband Jimmy's father-in-law, was the senior Jewish chaplain in the European theater during World War II and instrumental in helping displaced Jews after the war—some of whom were initially forced to share their camps with Nazi prisoners of war and almost all of whom were confined behind barbed wire. As an Advisor on Jewish Affairs to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Rabbi Nadich visited the Displaced Persons (DP) camps in the American zone, bringing David Ben-Gurion with him on one such visit, and directly advised General Eisenhower on how to improve conditions.

Like the points of light that make up a hologram, each of these stories represents an information recording of the "original scene," allowing us to view it from a range of different angles, as if it were still present.

Barry, Les, Shira and Jimmy are grateful to Rabbis Roly, Marcelo and Felicia, and Ari, our Hazzan, for weaving the lives of the six million Jewish martyrs into the tapestry of the Yom Kippur service. They also thank BJ member Myriam Abramowicz, the inspiring leader of BJ's Holocaust programming, with whom they worked on their texts. And finally, they thank all BJ members for bearing witness to the story of each of their relatives.

You can bear further witness by reading the stories that you were not able to hear during services at www.bj.org/shoah. ■

Brukhim Haba-im: Welcome to our New Staff!

By Sian Gibby

Anyone who has been a BJ member for even a short period of time knows that the shul has a knack for hiring great staff people—and our latest crop of hires is no exception. New positions allow us to tailor duties to the specific needs of the synagogue as it changes, grows and explores new facets of our responsibilities in the Jewish community and the world in general.

We look forward to enhancing our relationships with our new staff members as we head into BJ's future together. They are listed below in alphabetical order.

Esther Bedolla

Administrative Assistant,
Education Department



In Esther's own words: "I grew up in San Antonio, but I was born in Mexico and just got my U.S. citizenship in August. I did my undergrad work at the University of Texas

at Austin and then a master's degree at University College London in Hebrew and Jewish Studies. After moving back from the U.K., I got a job at a start-up in Texas. When that start-up relocated, I moved to New York because I wanted to work at a nonprofit, and there are more opportunities in that area here." As to what she likes to do in her free time, Esther replies: "I like watching movies, reading books I wish I'd been taught in school (e.g., Tolstoy, Lawrence, etc.), drawing and embroidery."

Suzy Burstein

Director of Operations



Suzy is too quick-witted, warm and funny to capture in just a few words, but to focus on a few facts: She is a Midwesterner who grew up "high Reform" in the Chicago and Pittsburgh

areas before going to American University to study Communications. She spent 18 years at Hadassah; among her duties was organizing their annual convention. Her main interest is travel. When I asked her for travel favorites and highlights, she rattled

off a mind-boggling global list: Eastern and Sub-Saharan Africa, South America and Southeast Asia, among others. Bonus fact: She is a mere two states away from visiting every one of the United States of America.

Eran Cohen

Jr. Staff Accountant, Finance Department



Eran told me: "I was born and raised in Nahariya, Israel. I moved to the U.S. two years ago. I studied at Ruppin Academic Center in Economics with a concentration

in Accounting. How did I arrive at BJ? I searched so I could continue with my accounting career, and I saw an opening at BJ. I preferred to work in a Jewish environment because it reminds me a little bit of home. My hobbies are playing basketball, doing sports, and watching movies."

Daniel LeDonne

Marketing Communications Associate



Daniel says: "I grew up on Long Island, and got my bachelor's degree from NYU. After graduation, I traveled to Israel for a year as a volunteer English teacher at an elementary

school, which is where I was put in touch with Stephanie [Berger] who was looking for a new hire. By the grace of some minor miracle, that hire became me. I got back stateside in July and started work at the end of August. For pastimes, I enjoy reading, writing and playing guitar. Guilty pleasures include dark chocolate, action movies, and practicing my Hebrew while I watch my Israeli friends wince."

Jo Icaza

Program Coordinator, Rabbinic Office



Jo told me: "I was born in Ecuador. I moved to Naples, Florida, in 1999 looking for something different. Then I moved back to Ecuador in 2001, but found that 'you can't go home,' so I returned to Naples in 2003

and lived there until August 2014, when I moved here. I always heard about BJ from the rabbis and educators at the synagogue where I worked in Naples: its energy and *ruah*. So, I visited BJ for Kabbalat Shabbat services a few times when I was in NYC, thinking, 'This would be a great place to work!' I saw the ad for a Program Coordinator on JewishJobs.com, and here I am. I like martial arts, walking in parks, taking online courses on anything that captures my curiosity, and reading."

Allison Kapusta

Assistant Director of Education
for Early Childhood



Allison went to Binghamton University and got an M.A. in Jewish Education at The Jewish Theological Seminary. In grad school, her study focused on Shabbat and holiday

programs for infants and young children. She worked in Jewish education and community engagement at Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in DC and Romemu in New York City. At BJ, Allison supervises staff and current programs for families with young children, including Bim Bam, PJ Library and Children's Services. Her favorite things include chocolate and Post-It notes (not necessarily in combination), and ice hockey. "I am a huge NY Rangers fan!"

Nina Loftspring

Assistant Director of Education for
Curriculum and Learning



Nina got her master's degree in Jewish Education from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. Before coming to BJ, she worked in development

on HUC-JIR's Cincinnati campus. Nina is a 2009 graduate from Indiana University with a triple major in Jewish Studies, History, and Non-Profit Management. She grew up in Cincinnati. Her hobbies include drinking coffee in Central Park, traveling and spending time with her family.

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YOUTH AND FAMILY EDUCATION

A Memorable Visit with Rabbi Marcelo

By Wendy Waxman, Kitah Aleph teacher at BJ Hebrew School

One of the hallmarks of the Kitah Aleph curriculum at BJ Hebrew School is our Synagogue Study. Learners explore what takes place in a synagogue—its sacred objects, rituals, life cycle events—and the role a shul plays in an individual’s life and the Jewish community as a whole. Of course, the focus of our study is our very own synagogue, B’nai Jeshurun.



Joined by Kitah Gan, the Kindergarten students in our Hebrew School, the children launched our investigation by interviewing Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein in his office. Our goals were to learn about what it means to be

a rabbi, and the rabbi’s role in the synagogue, the lives of the people, our BJ community, and beyond. Their questions ranged from, “How did you become a rabbi?” and “How do you make a speech?” to “Can you tell us about your Bar Mitzvah?” The latter question turned out to be as important as the others as it helped the children to identify with Rabbi Marcelo as a regular person and feel comfortable with him.

Rabbi Marcelo welcomed us into his office, which is lined with books from top to bottom. The impressive number of books—an ideal springboard for our discussion—captivated the students. We learned that a rabbi’s job includes teaching and learning. Rabbi Marcelo explained that, through reading his books, he continues to learn what the sages teach us about Torah. He pointed out that there is no end to what we can learn about our tradition, which is why—in addition to reading—he engages other rabbis and thinkers in conversations to help him interpret the Torah.

After spending some time in Rabbi Marcelo’s office, the students followed him into BJ’s beautiful sanctuary. The children were

“The impressive number of books—an ideal springboard for our discussion—captivated the students. We learned that a rabbi’s job includes teaching and learning.”

interested in the stained glass windows and asked questions about the unique ceiling design. They were also curious about the organ pipes above the ark, which they thought looked like “giant pencils.” Rabbi Marcelo invited the students to take an up-close look into the Ark where the children found nine Torah scrolls. The children also learned that one of the Torah scrolls is particularly special because it was hidden for many years, rescued, and then donated by a family to B’nai Jeshurun.

Kitah Aleph’s visit with Rabbi Marcelo fueled the children’s enthusiasm for learning about their synagogue, their community and its leaders. Todah, Rabbi Marcelo!

Wendy Waxman is a Kitah Aleph teacher at the BJ Hebrew School. Wendy also serves on the Families with Young Children committee. She, her husband Matthew, and daughter Rosalie have been BJ members since 2011. ■

Welcome to our New Staff! (continued from page 7)

Rena Nasar

Intern, Communications Department



Rena says: “I’m from Brooklyn. I’m a student at Baruch College majoring in Journalism and Middle East Studies. My family is Syrian-Jewish. This job opportunity was sent to me from the

Executive Director at the Hillel at Baruch. I started in summer and am loving what I’m doing at BJ. For fun, I like to write. And I also sing in a band. We perform gigs in the city—one is coming up in February.”

Leah Michelson

Assistant to Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon and Executive Director Steven Goldberg



Here’s what Leah had to say: “Though I was born here in New York, I grew up in Cleveland. As an undergraduate, I studied Psychology at The College of Wooster and

earned my master’s degree in Psychology with a concentration in Animal Behavior and Conservation from Hunter College. I have worked for a variety of organizations, including The Bronx Zoo and The Nathan Kline Institute/New York University. After dedicating much of my academic and

professional career to science, animals and research, I was looking to become a part of a community where my work would have a direct positive impact on its members. As a social justice-minded woman, I jumped at the opportunity to work for such an inspirational synagogue.” As to hobbies, Leah says, “I love to listen to NPR, see live theater, and play with my chihuahua, Hunter. I belong to a book club that always has me reading on the subway, but I also love to spend my commute listening to podcasts like This American Life and The Moth.”

Sian Gibby is a writer/editor at the Calandra Institute and Tablet magazine’s copy editor. ■

An Additional Soul: Family and Fun at the Reach for Shabbat Family Retreat

By Ivy Schreiber, Director of Education for Youth and Family

Circles began to form around nine different havdalah candles in the glass-walled sanctuary. As new and old friends gathered together around each candle, marking the separation of our beautiful Shabbat from the rest of the week, I could already see the impact of spending these past 25 hours together. This havdalah marked the end of a weekend in which more than 140 members of the BJ Hebrew School engaged in much-needed rest, prayer, games, hiking and family bonding at the Reach for Shabbat Retreat at the Isabella Friedman Jewish Retreat Center.

The weekend got underway Friday evening with the lighting of dozens of Shabbat candles at sundown. After a lovely Kabbalat Shabbat service, some families took advantage of a guided, moonlit walk around the lake. The 6th graders also had the first of three learnings about B'nai Mitzvah, during which parents and children shared their hopes and fears about their upcoming journey.



Many families began Shabbat morning with an inspiring hike that allowed us to pause and witness nature's beauty before returning to camp for an equally invigorating morning service led by Rabbinic Fellow Bryan Wexler. Families generously prepared kavannot before the start of the retreat that they shared during the service and throughout the weekend, enriching everyone's experience by imparting a piece of their own Torah.

After lunch, the games began. Children went on a wild scavenger hunt over the grounds, and then split into groups for exploration of the Torah portion that involved everything from blessing the beauty of nature to destroying two false idols. The 6th graders also enjoyed a moving moment in which they received a special blessing related to their own Torah portion. When asked what he thought of the final 6th grade



program, Zachary Cohn stated, "It was a beautiful, meaningful experience."

Meanwhile, parents spent time together in the synagogue, pairing Rabbi Felicia's learning with an assortment of wines. Outside, the children competed in Maccabiah, ending the games with a very loud and spirited cheer-off. Everyone regrouped for Havdalah as we ushered out Shabbat with singing and reflection. As the candles were extinguished, Matan Marder Friedgood of Kitah Hey described himself as "fantastically happy" and said that he and his mother "had shared a second soul this weekend," referencing the teaching in our tradition that we are given an extra soul on Shabbat to more fully experience and appreciate our weekly day of rest and reflection.

No retreat is complete without a talent show. There was singing, dancing, musical

The power of immersing in the Reach for Shabbat Retreat is the best of Jewish experiential education."

and comedy acts, and a costume parade through the Great Hall. Afterwards at the campfire, as 10-year-old Eliza Bromberger stood in line for her sixth marshmallow, she declared, "This weekend was a lot of fun!"

Lekh Lekha, the weekly parashah (Torah portion) read during the retreat, is about journeys and finding one's way. To close the retreat on Sunday, each participant

identified something they would take with them from the retreat. We recorded those ideas on footprints, which are now posted in the 89th Street Community House. These footprints signify that the beauty of the retreat doesn't have to end when we go home. There are many ways to incorporate meeting new friends, the opportunity to be outdoors, feeling connected to family and the BJ community, and the restfulness of disconnecting from the outside world as we continue on our way.

The power of immersing in the Reach for Shabbat Retreat is the best of Jewish experiential education. It energized our children and parents, allowed educators and families to connect in new ways, and provided a launch pad for further learning and engagement in the year ahead. We look forward to continuing this sense of fun, bonding and shared souls throughout 5775. ■

THE SHMITA YEAR

A Year of Release

By Alex Braver, Sarit Horwitz, and Bryan Wexler, BJ Rabbinic Fellows

What does a millennia-old agricultural law have to do with our spiritual lives today?

Shmita is the seventh year of a seven-year agricultural cycle found in the Torah. It is commonly translated as “sabbatical year,” but it literally means “release.” It is a year when the land is left fallow, agricultural activities are put on hold, debts are forgiven, and other agricultural and economic adjustments are made in order to take a step back and ensure that we are living in a just and healthy society. The shmita year is a year of rest, pause, introspection and release.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), first Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel under the British Mandate, writes in *Shabbat Ha’aretz* [Sabbath of the Land]:

The forcefulness that is inevitably a part of our regular, public lives lessens our moral refinement. There is always a tension between the ideal of listening to the voice inside us that calls us to be kind, truthful and merciful, and the conflict, compulsion and pressure to be unyielding that surrounds buying, selling and acquiring things. These aspects of the world of action distance us from the divine light and prevent its being discernible in the public life of the nation. This distancing also permeates the morality of individuals like poison. Stilling the tumult of social life from time to time in certain predictable ways is meant to move this nation, when it is well-ordered, to rise towards an encounter with the heights of its inner moral and spiritual life. We touch the divine qualities inside us that transcend all the stratagems of the social order, and that cultivates and elevates our social arrangements, bringing them towards perfection.

What is the connection between a physical relationship with our land and our own morality? Does incorporating any type of personal shmita practice affect who we are as people—or on an even greater level, does it affect our societies? Rav Kook argues that there’s an element of regular life that beats down on us and inhibits us from being as fully moral as possible. This tension that he writes about is profound, this tension between listening to our inner voice and responding to the outside world. Ideally, while we know we still have to exist in that outside world,



we hope that we tip the scale in favor of our inner voice. But what does this have to do with shmita? The shmita year is an attempt to place us far away from the pull of buying and selling and, according to Rav Kook, allows us to focus on listening to the internal voice of truth. So we “release” for an entire year. For that year, we try and rid ourselves of an attitude that tells us “more!” and that measures our worth by our acquisitions. We strain to better hear this quiet inner voice in the midst of the “tumult of social life.”

Here in New York City, the traditional laws of shmita might not work for a number of reasons—first and foremost that the practice

For that year, we try and rid ourselves of an attitude that tells us ‘more!’ and that measures our worth by our acquisitions.”

is only obligatory in Israel! So how can we make it work for us in our here-and-now? For one, we might simply hold up the vision of shmita as our ideal. What would it mean to live every day truly believing that everything we buy and every dollar we spend is just a regrettable concession to necessity? What would it mean to hold in our mind the idea

that our ideal life would be a life without money, without property, without commerce? Even without participating in the actual ritual, we can remember that shmita challenges us to envision a utopia that is not based on the things that we imagine, in our more shallow moments, will make us happy.

Yet there are also ways to actually *do* something that removes us from what Rav

Kook calls “the forcefulness that is inevitably a part of our regular, public lives.” Maybe this year, we can take note of the conditions under which our clothes are made. Maybe this year, we can make an effort to know where our food comes from, to buy more locally and to work toward ensuring just treatment of local farmworkers. And maybe, by experimenting for a year with living in a more gentle, elevated way, we can discover something divine within ourselves. ■

KOL HADASH new voice • WINTER 2014

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Designer: Harriet R. Goren

Mazal Tov

To the following members and their families on their B'nai Mitzvah (October, November, December):

Henry Shuster	Elias Silver
Benjamin Callahan-Gold	Celia Katz
Noah Rubín	Jack Carl
Daniel Borkow	Eliza Bender
Ella Rubín	Jacob Fraiman
Helena Kopans-Johnson	Caleb Mintz
Eden Chanko	

To the following members and their families (through November 14):

- Jack Stern, on the recent publication of his book *Ending Back Pain: 5 Powerful Steps to Diagnose, Understand, and Treat Your Ailing Back*.
- Tobi Koffer and her entire family on the arrival of her son, Natan Raúl Koffer.
- Harriet Goren, for being selected as the featured artist for the 5775/2014-2015 Women of Reform Judaism Art Calendar, which has been published annually since 1913.
- Matthew and Erin Yoeli, Susan Etra and Michael Yoeli, Dahlia and Belle Etra Yoeli, on the birth of their daughter, granddaughter and niece, Sophia Ketty Yoeli.
- Avital Mendelson and Asaff Harel on their engagement.
- Amy and Bob Pollack on the publication of their book, *The Course of Nature: A Book of Drawings on Natural Selection and Its Consequences*.
- Herb Fischer, who was named Associate Professor of History and Political Science at the downtown campus of City College.
- Robert and Barbara Willinger on the marriage of their son, Jeremy Willinger, to Kelly Rodal.
- Brittany Boughter and Erin Fraser on their wedding.
- Rose Bell and her daughter Frannie Bell on Frannie's engagement to Aaron Schulman-Marcus.
- Matt Turk, BJ musician, on being selected as a featured artist in the November issue of *Guitar Player* magazine.
- Eileen Loeb and Russell Shapiro on the birth of their daughter, Sasha Dylan Loeb Shapiro.
- Nicole Duclos and Alan Roemer on the birth of their son, Noah Eli Roemer.
- Audrey Sieger, Larry Drath, Dalia Levy and Carl Cunow on the birth of their grandson and son, David Kent Cunow. We also extend a Mazal Tov to Ari, Nina, Aaron, Mariel and Sofia Priven.
- Edna Golandsky on the marriage of her son, Amit Friedlander, to Tania Zolotar in Israel.
- Audrey Simons on her engagement to Jacob Capelle.

Yasher Koah

- Yasher Koah to our BJ community! For Yom Kippur this year, BJ members donated over \$30,900 to West Side Campaign Against Hunger—enough funding to keep their emergency food pantry supplied with healthy food for three weeks.

Condolences (through November 14)

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

- Victor Friedman, and we extend our sincere condolences to his wife, Vicki Schonfeld, and Eric, Diana, Michael, Jared and Remi Friedman, and their entire family.
- Charles (Chick) Finder, and we extend our sincere condolences to his wife Stephanie Finder, their daughter Emily Weiss, and their entire family.
- Albert Levine, and we extend our sincere condolences to his wife Naomi Levine, their son Matthew Levine, their daughter-in-law Sara Pasternak Levine, their grandchildren Mimi, Max and Joseph Pasternak Levine, and their entire family.

The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the tragic death of our member Cydney Arther, and we extend our sincere condolences to her entire family.

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

- Rodney Lubeznik and Susan Goodman on the death of Rodney's mother, Shirley Lubeznik.
- Edna Golandsky and her children, Amit and Galit Friedlander, on the death of Edna's mother-in-law, Marianne Friedlander.
- Nancy and Howard Feinglass and their children, Gillian and Benjamin Feinglass, on the death of Howard's brother-in-law, Arnie Goodman.
- Shirley Abraham and her children, Noah and Maia Offitzer, on the death of Shirley's father, Yehuda Abraham.
- Howard Jacobson and Kathryn Wolfson, and their children Erica, Jennifer and Joshua Jacobson, on the death of Howard's mother, Pauline Jacobson.
- Joanne Palmer and Andrew Sherman on the death of their brother-in-law, David Makler.
- Jacques and Karen Capelluto, and their daughter Katherine Capelluto Prime, on the death of Jacques's mother, Ketty Capelluto.
- Michael Bar and Gabriel Katz, and their children Amelia and Zachary Bar-Katz, on the death of Michael's father, Meyer Bar.
- BJ Director of Israel Engagement Orli Moss and Jonathan Cummings, and their children, Nomi, Tomer and Ella-Poppy Cummings, on the death of Orli's grandfather, Isaac Gilinsk.
- Allan and Judith Lasky, and their daughter Belinda Lasky, on the death of Allan's mother, Sally Lasky.
- Rachel Epstein Klein and Mark Klein, and their children Sophie and Abbe Klein, on the death of Rachel's mother, Barbara Epstein.
- Anna Katz Brenner and her daughter, Rochelle Gold, on the death of Anna's brother, Morris Katz.
- BJ Social Action Coordinator Larissa Wohl on the death of her father, Steven Wohl.
- Lotte Knoller on the death of her daughter, Cindy Knoller.
- Rhonda Shafner and Eric Weisberg, and their son Ethan Weisberg, on the death of Rhonda's father, Sol Shafner.
- Rachel Epstein Klein and Mark Klein, and their children Sophie and Abbe Klein, on the death of Rachel's father, Morton Epstein.
- Josh and Julie Penzner, their children Rachel and Ethan Penzner, and their entire family on the death of Josh's grandfather, Mike Marcus.
- Larry Fox, and his son Malcom Fox, on the death of Larry's stepmother, Jeannette Jacobson.

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