



Congregation Beth Israel
חבורת בית ישראל

CBI NEWSletter

Mar/Apr 2016 - Adar I/Adar II/Nissan 5776

From the Rabbi



Holy friends,

I love this time of year. The days are getting longer; the bitterest of winter's cold is (please God!) behind us; and both Purim and Pesach are ahead of us during the next two months, which means we're well on our way toward spring.

Purim is a festival of veils and masks, costumes and revelry. At Purim we celebrate what's hidden (like Esther, hiding her Jewishness; like God, Whose name never appears in the megillah but Whose presence is palpable throughout) and what's revealed (like Esther "coming out" about who she truly is.)

This year we'll be celebrating Purim with a Harry-Potter-themed celebration and Purimspiel on the evening of Wednesday, March 25. Those of you who came to our Alice in Wonderland Purim last year will remember how Jen Burt transformed our building into Wonderland for the night. This year she's transforming our building into Hogwarts, and our Purim play will have several special Harry Potter twists. We'll begin at 5pm (it's a school night) -- save the date.

One lunar month after Purim comes Pesach (also known as Passover), the festival of our liberation. As always, we'll come together at CBI for a second-night community seder (Saturday April 23: save the date for that too!) where we'll tell the story of the Exodus through prayers, readings, poetry song, and -- as always -- an impromptu play put on by our community's kids, led by the wonderful Jane Shiyah.

On the second night of Pesach we'll begin counting the Omer. "Omer" means measures, as in measures of grain. Counting the Omer is an ancient agricultural custom: our Israelite ancestors counted the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, and then harvested grain to bring to God as a first-fruits offering at Shavuot. Today the Omer is a fruitful period in a different way: we use those weeks to nurture not seedlings but qualities within ourselves (kindness, compassion, good boundaries, good balance) and hope for a rich internal harvest at Shavuot-time.

This year everyone who comes to our seder will receive a free copy of "*Toward Sinai: Omer Poems*," my new collection of poetry which features one poem for each day of the Omer. I hope that some of you will choose to enrich that special period of the year by reading and reflecting on one poem each day. (And of course, if you are not coming to the seder but still want a copy, copies are available -- reach out to me, or pick one up on Amazon.)

At the end of the Omer period, I'll be taking a group from CBI to the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, Connecticut (not far from here, just down route 7) for what promises to be an amazing Shavuot retreat. (This year there will be no Shavuot celebration at Williams College because of reunion weekend, so it's a good year to try something new.) I've done this retreat before and it is wonderful -- and this year I'll be one of the teachers, alongside my ALEPH co-chair Rabbi David Evan Markus and many others.

This Shavuot retreat is co-presented by Hazon (a Jewish environmental organization) and by ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. Members of ALEPH Network communities (like ours) will receive a discount on registration. As my teacher Reb Zalman z"l (of blessed memory) wrote, "Shavuot is the time when the community gathers around the mountain, and makes pilgrimage to a holy place, for the ultimate transformative experience." More information is coming soon; for now, please save the dates of June 10-13 and plan to join us.

I wish you blessings on the journey toward spring!

Rabbi Rachel

**WEDNESDAY
MARCH 23:
DON'T MISS...**



A Very Harry Potter Purim

Bring a vegetarian / dairy dish for the feast!

The Megillah as you've never heard it before!

Brew potions! Play Quidditch! Cast spells! & more!



Hogwarts
aka CBI, 53 Lois St.
begins 5:00PM

PLEASE RSVP BY MARCH 10

office@cbiweb.org

SAVE THE DATE: Celebrate Shavuot at Isabella Freedman, June 10-13

Shavuot is the time when the community gathers around the mountain, and makes pilgrimage to a holy place, for the ultimate transformative experience.

—Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi ז"ל

Shavuot is one of the *shalosh regalim*, the three great pilgrimage festivals of antiquity. What better time to make our own pilgrimage: to Hazon / Isabella Freedman, a Jewish retreat center in Falls Village, Connecticut, for a three-day Shavuot retreat?

(This year there will be no late-night Torah study at Williams, because of the college's reunion schedule, so it's a good year for us to try something new.)

The Shavuot retreat at Isabella Freedman is amazing. It always features a line-up of some of Jewish Renewal's finest teachers (this year the list will include Rabbi Rachel and Rabbi David Evan Markus.) There will be opportunities for learning during the day as well as all night long on Shavuot. The davening (prayer) is amazing—there will be musicians, instruments, drummers, and many amazing leaders bringing their talents and energy to the experience.

This is also an opportunity to connect with other innovative, creative ALEPH Network communities in our region. Rabba Kaya will be bringing the Rimon community, Rabbi David will be bringing his Temple Beth-El community from City Island, Rabbi Brent Spodek will be bringing his Beacon Hebrew Alliance community from the Hudson Valley (among others). As members of an ALEPH Network community, CBI

members will receive a discount on retreat registration.

Highlights will include:

- Kosher and eco-friendly farm-to-table feast
- Parade for First-Fruits/*Bikkurim* with the Adamah farm and the goats
- Camp Teva for Kids: Jewish Outdoor, Food, and Environmental Fun!
- All-night vigil with chanting, meditation, text study and more
- Daybreak outdoor musical Torah service
- Enjoy the beauty of spring at Isabella Freedman
- Midnight hike to the top of the mountain
- Kosher artisanal cheese tasting and cheesemaking workshop
- Daily meditation and Torah Yoga
- Beautiful havdalah and closing ceremony Monday night

This will be a truly transformative Shavuot experience which none of our members will ever forget! Please save the dates (June 10-13) and plan to join us.

Every adult who comes to CBI's second-night community seder (Saturday, April 23) will receive a copy of Rabbi Rachel's latest collection of poems: 49 poems intended to enrich the period of the counting of the Omer, the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot. Here's what others have said about her collection:

TOWARD SINAI



OMER POEMS

RACHEL
BARENBLAT

The Omer is the period of 49 days between Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot. Through counting the Omer, we link liberation with revelation. Once we counted the days between the Pesach barley offering and the Shavuot wheat offering at the Temple in Jerusalem. Now as we count the days we prepare an internal harvest of reflection, discernment, and readiness. Kabbalistic (mystical) and Mussar (personal refinement) traditions offer lenses through which we can examine ourselves as we prepare ourselves to receive Torah anew at Shavuot. Here are 49 poems, one for each day of the Omer, accompanied by helpful Omer-counting materials. Use these poems to deepen your own practice as we move together through this seven-week corridor of holy time.

Praise for *Toward Sinai: Omer Poems*

Rachel Barenblat has gifted her readers with a set of insightful poems to accompany our journey through the wilderness during the Counting of the Omer. Deft of image and reference, engaging and provocative, meditative and surprising, this collection is like a small purse of jewels. Each sparkling gem can support and enlighten readers on their paths toward psycho-spiritual Truth.

--Rabbi Min Kantrowitz, author of [*Counting the Omer: A Kabbalistic Meditation Guide*](#)

Rachel Barenblat comes bearing a rich harvest. In *Toward Sinai*, her series of poems to be read daily during the counting of the Omer, a poem chronicles every step between Exodus and Sinai. The poems exist in the voices of the ancient Hebrews measuring grain each day between Passover and Shavuot, and also in a contemporary voice that explores the meaning of the Omer in our own day. Together, the poems constitute a layered journey that integrates mysticism, nature, and personal growth. As Barenblat writes: "Gratitude, quantified."

--Rabbi Jill Hammer, author of [*The Omer Calendar of Biblical Women*](#)

Your Torah is transcendent and hits home every time.

-- Rabbi Michael Bernstein, [*Rabbi Without Borders Fellow*](#)

Service times

First Fridays (check for listing).

Every Saturday
9:30 a.m. Shabbat Service
11ish a.m. Kiddush/Torah Study

Meditation minyan
Friday mornings, 9a.m.

Mar/Apr Shabbat candle lighting and Havdalah times



If you want to light Shabbat candles and make havdalah at the halakhically-accepted times, here they are:

Mar 4 5:28 lighting; Mar 5 6:38 havdalah
Mar 11 5:37 lighting; Mar 12 6:46 havdalah
Mar 18 6:45 lighting; Mar 19 7:54 havdalah
Mar 25 6:53 lighting; Mar 26 8:02 havdalah
Apr 1 7:01 lighting; Apr 2 8:10 havdalah
Apr 8 7:09 lighting; Apr 9 8:18 havdalah
Apr 15 7:17 lighting; Apr 16 8:28 havdalah
Apr 22 7:25 lighting; Apr 23 8:34 havdalah
Apr 29 7:33 lighting; Apr 30 8:42 havdalah

If it is your practice to light candles at a different hour of the day (perhaps not quite so early as halakha indicates during the winter, and not quite so late as halakha indicates during the summer), that's also a legitimate Reform Jewish choice. What's most important is that you're finding a way to incorporate Shabbat into your life.

The Jewish Bookshelf by Ezra the Scribe

We live in a post book era, books are so 20th century. But I still bump into bibliophiles who like to read physical books. Here is a list of books that belong on the Jewish book shelf.

1. Tanach, the 24 Books of the Hebrew Scripture. *Tanakh* is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the three traditional subdivisions: Torah ("Teaching", also known as the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im ("Prophets") and Ketuvim ("Writings")—hence **TaNakh**. If thou preferest not to readeth the King Jamish, than buy the JPS recent edition. My favorite books of the Tanach are the book of Ruth and Song of Songs.
2. The Siddur, the prayer book. Get a book that includes weekday, shabbat, festivals, and blessing for many occasions.
3. Pirke Avot, Chapters of our Fathers (there are no mothers, it was written 2 thousand years ago). It is a good introduction to the Talmud.
4. Hebrew dictionary.
5. History of the Jews by Solomon Grayzel.
6. The Joy of Yiddish. A good book for increasing your Yiddish vocabulary while laughing your head off, until you plotz.
7. A Hebrew Calendar, do you know when tu b'shevat is?

Nu, what's on your Jewish Book Shelf? Send your list to Ezra the Scribe care of chaim@bcn.net and we will put it in the next newsletter.

Ride Share

Are you in need of a ride to and from CBI to attend services or events?

Are you in need of a ride for local errands or appointments?

The CBI community can try to help. Please let Jack know what your needs are.

If you are able and willing to share rides or give rides, please send your information on your availability to Jack.



Ruthie's Lunch Bunch

We are a great group of people who get together once a month for a delicious lunch and a lot of conversation. If you are eligible for social security you are eligible to join us. We ask for RSVP's by the Monday before the luncheon.

March and April dates are as follows:

March 17 April 14

All dates are on a Thursday, we start promptly at noon. When you call the CBI office to RSVP, if there is a location change you will be notified, otherwise we will see you at CBI.

MICAH Award for Ed Oshinsky

By Susan Hogan

In 2010 CBI began preparing and delivering meals to about 100 people in Northern Berkshire County. Our team of cooks, drivers, packagers, labelers, and clean up crew has been led by Ed Oshinsky. Eddie coordinates, recruits, and spearheads fundraising for Take and Eat. Anyone who has tried to say No to Eddie knows it is impossible. We couldn't do Take and Eat without all our volunteers, but our volunteers would not be a productive group with Eddie's leadership and dedication to the monthly Take and Eat service

...and what does the Lord require of you, but to act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

~~~ Micah 6:8

Berkshire Interfaith Organizing Honors Unsung Heroes

By Mark Rondeau.

Almost to the day that they held their Founding Convention a year before in the very same place, the faith-based activists of Berkshire Interfaith Organizing stopped to celebrate.

The 2016 Micah Awards Dinner, held at the former St. Mark's School on Columbus Avenue on Sunday, Jan. 24, was yet another first for the group. Berkshire Interfaith organizing is an interfaith group of clergy, congregations and regional affiliates who seek to make justice real in our communities.

Currently BIO's focus is on issues of food security and transportation, with regular team meetings to set goals, discuss strategy and take action. The group played a part in its first year in securing \$2 million more in funding for the Massachusetts Emergency Food Program, which provides goods for food programs throughout the state.

Building community and developing priorities through one-to-one conversations, BIO concentrates on relationship building and leadership development, as well as systemic community change. Nearly 300 people packed the auditorium at St. Mark's to pay tribute to nominees chosen from among the members of 12 of its 16 member groups. Including a college student, a college professor, retirees, two nuns and more, all the nominees have made their mark through active service. They were chosen because they help exemplify the verse from the book of Micah from which the dinner gets its name: "The Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God."

The groups and their nominees: Cathedral in the Night, Pittsfield: its volunteers; Congregation Beth Israel, North Adams, Ed Oshinsky; Congregation Knesset Israel, Pittsfield: Cindy Tatalovich; First Church of Christ, Pittsfield: Grace Hutchins, posthumous award; First Congregational Church, Dalton: Leslie Hazelton; First Congregational Church, Williamstown: Carolyn Behr; Lee Congregational Church, Lee: Judy Morehouse; Northern Berkshire Interfaith Action Initiative: organizing trainings or a trip to Boston and the Statehouse that two vanloads of BIO activists took in September.

Berkshire Interfaith Organizing is part of a New England organizing network, with five other similar groups, called the InterValley Project, "Organizing for Justice in New England and the Nation." BIO is governed by an executive council made up of representatives from its member congregations and groups; it employs two community organizers and a communications specialist. Since November it has been headquartered at Shire City Sanctuary at 40 Melville St. in

Kathy Hrach; Sisters of St. Joseph: Sr. Kathryn Flanagan and Sr. Barbara Faille; South Congregational Church, Pittsfield: Mary Wheat; St. Mark Catholic Church, Pittsfield: Dick Murphy; St. John's Episcopal Church, Williamstown: Jim Mahon; St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Pittsfield: Joan Evans.

Given that food security plays such a strong role both in BIO's activism and in the extensive volunteerism of so many of the Micah Award nominees, it seemed appropriate that its members and guests gathered together for a meal, prepared by chef Robin Lenz, of St. John's Episcopal Church, herself an active volunteer. Donations of food and supplies were made by BJ's Wholesale, Guido's Fresh Marketplace and Mazzeo's Meats.

Before, during and after the awards program, members from the various congregations freely mingled, exchanging hugs, handshakes and stories. Though in different congregations or groups, many attendees have known each other for years and over time have volunteered for the same programs or attended community workshops together. And in a year plus of BIO, these bonds have only grown, through meetings and numerous activities, such as in numerous community

Pittsfield.

For more information about BIO, call Wendy Krom, Lead Organizer, at 413-464-1804, or email: berkshire.organizing@gmail.com.

Adults \$21; kids \$9; donations are welcome so that "all who are hungry [may] come and eat". (If the price is a hardship, contact the rabbi: rabbibarenblat@gmail.com)

add your text

Congregation Beth Israel's Second Night

COMMUNITY PASSOVER *seder*

TOWARD
SINAI

Saturday, April 23, 6pm

Bring a kosher-for-Pesach nondairy dish to share
(we'll provide the main course.)

Hear, tell, & experience the story of the Exodus
through story, poetry, song, and more.

(Also, the kids will put on an impromptu play.)

OMER POEMS

RACHEL
BARENBLAT

Each adult will receive a gift from the synagogue: a free copy of Rabbi Rachel's brand-new collection of poems for the Omer, the 7 weeks between Pesach and Shavuot.

RSVP: office@cbiweb.org

PosterMyWall.com

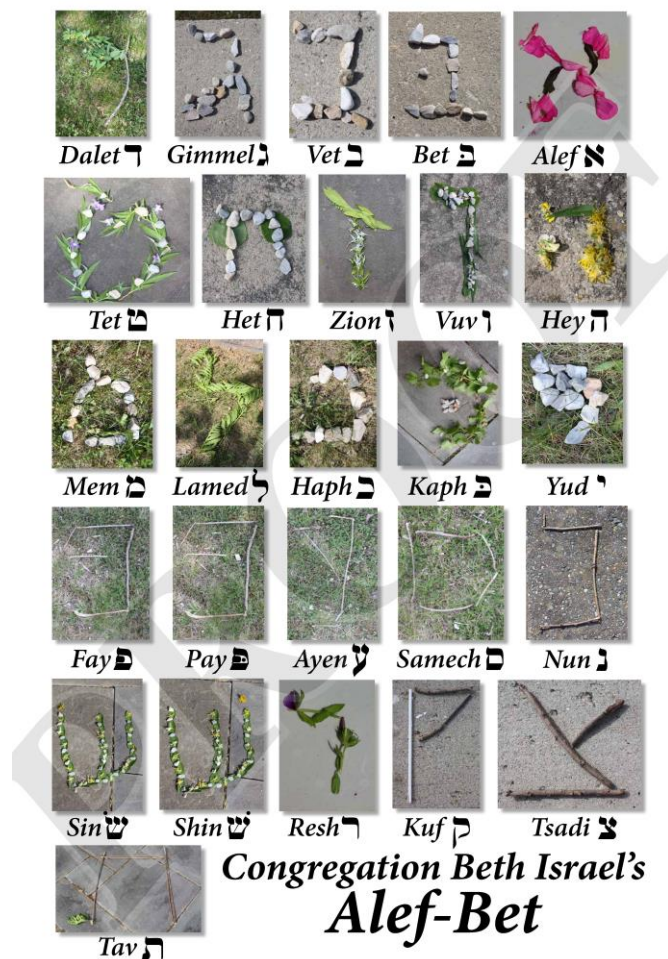
School News! Purim Celebration

Our next holiday to celebrate together is the festive Purim. We will be celebrating as a school with a special puppetry performance, brunch and workshop for making our own purim puppets! This will be on Sunday March 13, before our March break.

Special guest and Children's Puppeteer Anna Sobel will join us on Sunday March 13, at 11am-2pm. We will begin with a performance geared for preschool and elementary school students, move into a delicious bagel brunch and then everyone,

young and old can dive into puppet making to our hearts content! Invited guest is also local puppeteer David Lane. Different kinds of puppet making materials will be available for all ages. **This day is free of charge** and a joint project of Hand in Hand and the CBI Community Hebrew School and is partially funded by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Please RSVP to me at david@maggiddavid.net if you would like to attend.



The above poster made by CBI's own Jane Shiyah and her students is
available for purchase to support the school!

Robin Brickman's Visit - Wonderful things are occurring! - by Rose Ellis

"I had the opportunity to visit the CBI Hebrew School on Monday during Robin's visit. It was a wonderful, artistic hands-on celebration of Tu B'Shvat! Everyone, including Rabbi, David and staff were thoroughly engaged and enjoyed contributing their drawings and cut-outs to a life-size, paper tree mural. I look forward to seeing the students' finished product! This was a fine example of integrated learning and sharing."

I visited the CBI Community Hebrew School on Monday, Jan 25th, to observe Robin Brickman, a local artist and illustrator of children's books, work with our students on an integrated art project in celebration of Tu B'Shvat. Children and staff designed a mural in celebration of trees, the environment and nature that included leaves, birds and insects.

It was a wonderful learning experience and holiday celebration for all! I was delighted to, also, participate and help!

This collaboration and integrated experience was organized by David Arfa, CBI's Education Director.





Some of the CBI Community Hebrew School's Ukelele Orchestra posing for photographer Len Radin.

CBI Hebrew School Website Is Up and Running and Other News from Education Director, Maggid, David Arfa

I'm glad to report that our CBI Community Hebrew School Website is now live! Our school can be found at cbihebrewschool.weebly.com. I chose the weebly platform because of its simple drag and drop interface, which means it's easy to create and change pages.

Our site has all sorts of information about our school, our classes, our teachers, our calendar and our projects. In addition, each class has a password protected page that is filled with parent resources for home use. Over time, we are able for each class to continue to add resources for families. By keeping this part of our website password protected, families who join our school will gain an additional benefit through access to this online resources section.

Our Tu B'Shvat program was a success! Robin Brickman loved our school and was so impressed by all that we are doing. Her paper sculptures were well received and the Tree of Life over by the piano is the 'Fruit' of our labors. We began with a full Seder, with lots of fruits and nuts organized with special meanings and our 4 glasses of grapejuice. We shared blessings, tasted lots of foods and honored the trees by remembering what they provide for us (wood, air, shade, habitat, beauty, climbing fun) as well as hearing an ancient story from the Talmud.

Once, a traveler runs out of both food and water. Food, we can go for several weeks, but water is very dangerous. After two days, our hiker was reduced to crawling and thankfully, came to a wondrous carob tree, with a fresh stream running from its roots, ripened fruit and wonderful shade too. After refreshing and sleeping and refreshing some more, the hiker wanted to bless the tree.

How would you give thanks? Our hiker said, your fruit is already sweet and your water is already fresh and your shade is already cooling. What more can I add? May all of your offspring have as sweet fruit, fresh water and cooling shade as you!” And still today, this is a traditional blessing given to teachers. In addition, each baruch contains all the refreshment of dropping to our knees and sipping fresh sweet waters because both knee and stream are both words made with the letters of baruch.

Our classes are continuing work on Hebrew letters, words and phrases and Torah stories for Alef Tav, Israel and the Amidah for Ne’arim, and Mourners Kaddish, Mitzvot, and Torah learning for the Bnai Mitzvah class.

Simchas!!



Congratulations to Fern and Ken Sann on the birth of their new grandson-Marley Albert Sann, born November 27 in Melbourne, Australia. Parents are Simone and Maxx Sann. Other grandparents are Yaffa and Morris Klooger also of Melbourne.



Dan and Becky Cellana are thrilled to introduce Samuel Finley Cellana, born 1.26.16 , weighing 6lbs 12oz.



by Rabbi Rachel

One of the reasons I delight in serving CBI is that ours is such an inclusive community. Our members come from Jewish backgrounds ranging from Reform to Orthodox, and a variety of non-Jewish backgrounds, as well. We proudly align with the Reform movement in its commitment to modernity and pluralism, values near to my heart.

The Reform Movement understands that modern Jewish life is changing – becoming more porous, innovative and experimental. In the 21st century, Jewish denominational lines and boundaries are becoming less important than they were a generation ago. Across the board, Jewish life today is increasingly trans-denominational, creative, and focused on re-forming and renewing Judaism to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

That's where my other role, as co-chair of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, comes into play. Jewish Renewal is a trans-denominational movement to revitalize Judaism, and is the context within which I was ordained a rabbi.

My two spiritual homes, Congregation Beth Israel and Jewish Renewal, have long been connected by virtue of my service in both places. Now our connection has become more concrete. I could not be more delighted to be sharing with you the news that our community is now part of a new collaborative initiative called the ALEPH Network.

The ALEPH Network is an alliance of organizations, individuals, shuls, and more at the vibrant cutting edge of Judaism. *The ALEPH Network is not a denomination*, but rather a sign that the person or institution to which it is attached is doing innovative, heart-centered, spiritual, meaningful work. It can be congruent with denominationally-affiliated congregational life (as in our case — we remain a proud affiliate of the URJ) and also with organizations, institutions, and individuals who are independent or post-denominational.

Being part of the ALEPH Network connects us with other creative, innovative, and thoughtful people, organizations, and communities around the world. We will reap the benefits of that connection in a variety of ways, among them sharing ideas and materials and engaging in joint programming.

(On the joint programming front, a spring holiday retreat is already in the works -- I'm taking a CBI delegation to Isabella Freedman / Hazon, an amazing Jewish retreat center in Northern Connecticut, in June for a Shavuot retreat. We'll receive a substantial discount because we're part of the ALEPH Network. More on that soon.)

There are also other perks of joining the ALEPH Network. Later this winter our leadership will be invited to join a brand-new online space for ALEPH Network members. We'll have the opportunity to promote our events and happenings to other Network members. We'll also receive the benefit of

early registration for ALEPH telecourses and for the summer's ALEPH Kallah. I look forward to sharing more about these things, and other benefits of Network membership, in coming months.

Joining the ALEPH Network is a way of expressing gratitude for the many benefits of involvement with ALEPH which we've been receiving for years, among them the service of ALEPH-trained clergy and student clergy, use of Jewish Renewal liturgical materials and melodies, the availability of Jewish Renewal spiritual technologies such as *hashpa'ah* (spiritual direction) which I offer to members of our community, and more. Until now, there was no fiscal way for us to thank ALEPH for Jewish Renewal's melodies, materials, and spiritual modalities. Now there is, and I am delighted that we are taking part.

And finally — joining the ALEPH Network is a small way of “giving back,” financially, to the organization which ordained me and made it possible for me to serve as your rabbi. I look forward to continuing to share with y'all the countless spiritual gifts I have received from being part of Jewish Renewal!

Todah Rabah!

Sue Hogan and Suzanne Graver for bringing and hosting Jim Shepard's wonderful talk at CBI.

Susan Hogan for introducing Ed Oshinsky at the MICAH awards.

Rabbi Rachel for the Tu b'shevat Seder.

Jane Miller for administrative re-organizing the CBI office.

Robin Brickman for bringing her art to the CBI school.

Jane Miller and **Barbara Kaplan** for Ruthie's Lunch Bunch.

The Shamashim for hosting our Shabbats.

The Take and Eat volunteers for another wonderful Sunday lunch cooked, packed and delivered to the homebound in North Adams.

MICAH Awards dinner attendees who came to celebrate and honor Ed Oshinsky.

Beth Callahan and **Heather Levy** and **Rose Ellis** for volunteering at the CBI Community Hebrew School.

Chaim and Alice for always trying to make the CBI Library better and better.

Chaim Bronstein for delivering the Berkshire Jewish Voice to local businesses.

Helene Armet for her amazing challot every shabbat.

R'Pam Wax for sharing her Birthday celebration with us after services and **Chaim Bronstein** for sponsoring Pam's Birthday Kiddush-Plus.

And All Ya'll – you know who you are!

An Weekend of Abundance In Late February

A Musical Shabbat with Rabbi Rachel & Rabbi David



Rabbi David Evan

Markus, my ALEPH co-chair, will be co-leading Shabbat services with me over the February 27 weekend. Those of y'all who were with us at the end of August last time he visited may remember the beauty and sweetness he brings to the bimah. Expect music, harmony, teachings, and an extra helping of joy. Please join us for **Friday night services at 7:30pm on Friday February 26**, and **Saturday morning services at 9:30am on Saturday February 27**.

Jill Hammer, co-author of *The Hebrew Priestess*, **a groundbreaking book about women's spiritual leadership from antiquity to today. Rabbi Jill will speak at 7pm on Saturday February 27 at Temple Anshe Amunim, 26 Broad Street in Pittsfield. She'll read from the book, talk about how it came to be, answer questions, and sign copies of the book. Don't miss this!**

A Talk by Rabbi Jill Hammer, Author of *The Hebrew Priestess*



CBI is joining with Rimon and Temple Anshe Amunim to present a visit to the Berkshires from **Rabbi**

Write songs of love with Bernice Lewis



Local resident (and nationally known singer / songwriter) Bernice Lewis will present a workshop on "How to Write a Jewish Love Song," co-presented by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. **11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday February 28, \$10.00, includes a kosher style buffet lunch.** Bring your instrument or just your voice. Bring a smart cell phone to record your song, and a notebook and writing tool! Bring your sweetie! RSVP's requested by February 24 to office@cbiweb.org or by calling [\(413\) 822-5267](tel:(413)822-5267).

I hope you'll join us for some or all of these special happenings at CBI.

Blessings to all,

Rabbi Rachel

Results from the Adult Education Survey

January 2016

Sample

- 26 people completed the survey
 - 15 completed it online
 - 3 returned the survey by email
 - 8 completed physical copies

Results:

- 17 people (65%) interested in the course “An introduction to Judaism’s foundational books”
- 12 people (46%) interested in a tour of Jewish North Adams
- 11 people (42%) interested in challah baking
- 10 people (38%) interested in current events in Israel and the Middle East
- 9 people (35%) interested in Israeli folk dancing
- 9 people (35%) interested in a Jewish book discussion group
- 6 people (23%) interested in producing cookbook
- 6 people (23%) interested in a choral (singing) group
- 5 people (19%) interested in the course “Rituals of Death and Dying” (with Rabbi Rachel)
- 6 people (23%) interested in prayer book Hebrew; Modern Hebrew; Biblical Hebrew
- 5 people (19%) interested in writing – personal theology, ethical or living wills
- 5 people (19%) interested in Hebrew calligraphy
- 4 people (15%) interested in making a tallit, yarmulke (kippah), challah cover
- 4 people (15%) interested in Zionism; the history of Israel
- 4 people (15%) interested in Torah reading (trope, cantillation) for people who read Hebrew
- 4 people (15%) interested in North Adams Jewish Historical Society (a club for people interested in it)
- 3 people (12%) interested in Yiddish fluency
- 2 people (8%) interested in creating a ketubah
- 13 people (50%) interested in a Limmud-style Sunday
- Best Times:
 - 38% Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon
 - 35% Wednesday evening
 - 31% Thursday evening
 - 23% Sunday evening
 - 23% Tuesday evening
 - 19% Monday evening
 - Other dates/times seem less ideal.
 - 15% Saturday afternoon
 - 12% for Wednesday morning / Monday afternoon / Saturday evening
 - 8% for Monday or Friday morning
 - 8% for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday afternoon
 - 8% for Friday evening
 - 4% for Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday morning

Additional Comments on the Education Survey:

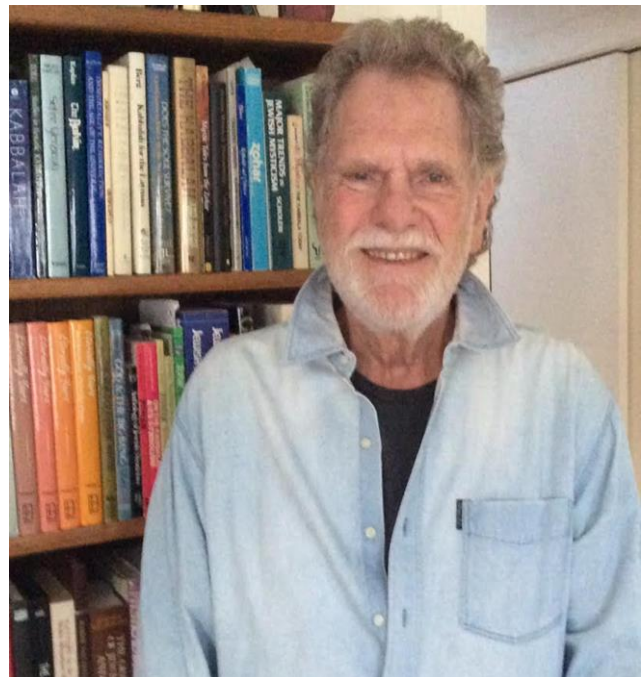
- Please continue efforts to improve the audio systems in the sanctuary as well as in the surrounding areas.
- Saturday after services would be good. / Friday morning after meditation would be good on days when there was no Kabbalat Shabbat. Friday after a shabbat meal or service / Weekday evenings would be okay.
- Saturday after services is a good time for some things
- Bible study for Beginners.
- I'm very excited about the suggestion of a chorus. I was part of a Jewish chorus when we lived in the Pioneer Valley, and I very much miss it.
- One person suggested a Limmud-style Sunday would be best if held during late fall/ "mud season" (not during hiking or skiing season).
- Another suggested it was best to have programs in the summer, late spring, or early fall.

Thank you to Chaim Bronstein, Liz Miller, and Michael Kaplan for their work on the survey.

The Foundations of Judaism Today Led by Michael Kaplan

What is the Midrash? The Mishna and Gemarra, and how do they comprise the Talmud? The Shulchan Aruch? Where do Maimonides and Rashi fit in? Over four 90-minute sessions we will look at each of them and learn how these post-biblical books have helped Judaism evolve from a sacrificial cult to our religion today.

Four consecutive Tuesdays at 7:00 pm beginning April 5th. Open to all. For further information contact Jack Hockridge in the CBI office.



Friends:

Your donations are appreciated! If you have books or other items to donate to CBI call Chaim Bronstein at 917/609-6732. Please do not just drop them off.

2016 CBI Book Group Schedule

Name of Book	Additional Information	Author	Year	Genre	Number of Pages	Day, Time & Date of Meeting
Not in God's Name	Confronting Religious Violence	Rabbi Jonathan Sacks	2015	Non-Fiction	267 + Notes and Bibliography	Monday, 7:00 PM January 25
Yehuda Halevi	Biography of the Great Poet and Philosopher	Hillel Halkin	2010	Biography	313	Monday, 7:00 PM March 7
All Who Go Do Not Return	Author in search of new theology	Shulem Deen	2015	Memoir	286	Monday, 7:00 PM April 4
Odessa Tales		Isaac Babel	1931 2002	Short Stories		Monday, 7:00 PM May 2
The Girl From Human Street	History of a Jewish Family	Roger Cohen	2015	Memoir	300	Monday, 7:00 PM June 27
Constantine's Sword	A History of The Church and the Jews	James Carrol	2001	History	Only the first 234	Monday, 7:00 PM Aug 29
Killing a King	Rabin's Assassination	Dan Ephron	2015	History	300	Monday, 7:00 PM Oct 24
My Father's Paradise		Ariel Sabar	2009	Biography	325 + Appendices	Monday, 7:00 PM Dec 19

For more information, e-mail Chaim Bronstein at chaim@bcn.net.

Jim Shepard's *The Book of Aron*

By Suzanne Graver

CBI inaugurated its new Speaker's Series on January 22nd by inviting novelist Jim Shepard to discuss *The Book of Aron*, a story about a scrappy nine-year old boy struggling to survive in the Warsaw Ghetto and Dr. Janusz Korczak, a heroic historical figure, who dedicated his life to protecting the rights of children, in part by running an orphanage in the besieged ghetto. Shepard, a widely acclaimed author, teaches at Williams College and lives in Williamstown. In addition to *The Book of Aron*, he has published six previous novels and four short-story collections. *The Book of Aron*, his latest novel, received the American Library Association's Sophie Brody Medal for Achievement in Jewish Literature.

Roughly forty people turned out for this event, which CBI's Book Group sponsored. Shepard launched what turned out to be a wonderfully lively and enjoyable discussion by describing why and how he came to write *The Book of Aron*. When asked why he chose to narrate the story from the point of view of a fictional strange and ill-educated little boy, rather than a real-life hero, Dr. Janusz Korczak, Shepard spoke of his wariness about putting a "spectacularly saintly figure" at the center of his fiction, few of us being saints. Why then write about Korczak at all? A former student, aware of his professor's preoccupation with catastrophe, suggested Korczak to him, Shepard told us. Recalling that Korczak's *Diary* was sitting on his bookshelf, he reread it and came across a story about a boy whose dying mother told her son, "I'm going to stay alive long enough to get you into that orphanage."

Wondering what it would be like to be that boy, Shepard began writing *The Book of Aron*, but not before engaging in research so prodigious as to lead at least one reader to imagine that she was actually living in the Warsaw ghetto while reading this book. Teachers marveled at its insightful portrayal of troubled boys. Questions about his own family background led Shepard to mention his Jewish-father-in-law and Catholic boyhood, along with some amusing parallels between the ways adults treated Aron and some kids he knew.

The engaging and substantive discussion that took place at CBI during Shepard's visit enriched our understanding of a novel that powerfully dramatizes both the dehumanization that ghetto life inflicted upon the boy and the humanizing effects of the relationship that the fictional child ended up developing--somewhat to his own surprise--with Korczak.

I spoke in my introduction to Shepard's talk about how daunting an assignment he took on by choosing to write a Holocaust book. "Our language lacks words to express this offense, the demolition of man," wrote Primo Levi, a renowned Jewish-Italian chemist, who

survived the Holocaust. Irving Howe, a prominent Jewish-American writer and critic, stated in a famous essay published in 1985 in *The New York Review of Books* that “the terribleness of this story requires an austere self-effacement” and “steadiness of creative purpose,” along with “emotional restraint . . . punctuated by an occasional note of quiet humor.” The severity of the subject requires, in addition, “a prose of refined simplicity” that “seldom presses for large ‘meanings’ or a rhetoric of transcendence.” Howe drew these requirements from reading Primo Levi’s writings. Appreciating above all, Levi’s “moral poise,” Howe praised his writings for creating “a strange kind of adventure . . . in which a few desperate acts and small deeds must be taken as tokens of a large spiritual intention.” By using the voice of a young, misunderstood, impoverished boy, Shepard creates in *The Book of Aaron* an analogous “strange kind of adventure.”

A review in *The Guardian* speaks to both the challenge and the achievement of Shepard’s book: “Narrative art about the [Holocaust](#) runs the risk of indulging our collective yearning. Please, writer; please, film-maker: save the characters we love. Alchemise the evil. Reassure us. *The Book of Aron* offers no reassurance. The fate of history is sealed. The book’s final pages are shattering. But by reclaiming an insignificant voice and deploying it to observe a great man, Shepard turns hell into a testament of love and sacrifice.”

Suzanne Graver

Please note: The current members of CBI’s “Speakers’ Series” are Alice Cande, Suzanne Graver (Chair), Bill Levy, and Tela Zasloff. Please send an email to sgraver@williams.edu if you are interested in joining this committee or wish to suggest speakers (but please be mindful of our limited budget). Thank you.

Donations

With Deep Thanks for your Generosity:

Take & Eat Donations

Anonymous	In honor of Ed Oshinsky on his MICAH Award recognition
Robert & Barbara Bashevkin	
Chaim Bronstein	In honor of Ed Oshinsky on his MICAH Award recognition
Ed Oshinsky	
Howard & Debbie Wineberg	In honor of Ed Oshinsky on his MICAH Award recognition

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Daniel & Becky Cellana	In honor of Dr. Jonah Marshall
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Phyllis Sands	In memory of Edith & Arthur Rosenthal
Audrey Thier & Peter Murphy	
Howard & Deborah Wineberg	In memory of Florence Wineberg



Death, mourning, and transformation taught by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat this Spring

This three-session class will explore Jewish ideas, teachings, and rituals around death and mourning. We'll explore texts both ancient and modern which will offer us different Jewish ideas about death and afterlife, taharah and burial, and kaddish and mourning customs.

The class will meet at 10am on Sundays April 3, May 15, and June 5. Cost: \$18 for CBI members, \$36 for non-members. Contact Jack Hockridge for further information and to sign up for the class.



**WE WANT YOU
to make use of the fabulous CBI
Library! It's all around you! Take
a look and sign out a book!
Coming soon to the Library: all
the poems of Rabbi Rachel
Barenblat.**

More from the Rabbi: Want To Meet With Me?

One of the great joys of this line of work is meeting when y'all want to talk. Whether you want to talk about synagogue business or about the intimate happenings of your spiritual life or your heart, I am honored to be able to listen to you.

In an emergency, I am always available. If the situation is not an emergency, I want to encourage you to reach out and make an appointment to see me (rather than just dropping in.)

I usually spend Mondays and Fridays doing synagogue work, but sometimes that work takes me out of the building -- e.g. if someone makes a pastoral care appointment with me and wants to meet at their place instead of at the shul -- so even on the days when I'm fully focused on synagogue work, I'm not always sitting behind the desk in the synagogue office.

If you know you're going to want to meet with me, it's helpful for me if you can drop me an email or give me a call and set up a meeting time. That way I can block out thirty minutes or an hour on my calendar, and I'll know that I will be dedicating that time to you (so I won't, for instance, be counting on that as time I need in order to prepare for Shabbat or whatever is next on my docket.)

I look forward to seeing you at CBI!

Rabbi Rachel

Upcoming Occasions

We wish happy birthdays and anniversaries to our members who have simchas during the coming months.

March Birthdays

Richard Cohen
Edward Oshinsky

Joan Benjamin
Cameron Miller
George Drasin
Patricia Anne Lipman
Alex Apkin
Sasha Rooney
Ruth Thier
Grace Bowen
John Hogan
Robert Hertzog
Andrew Levy
Rabbi Rachel
Barenblat
James Silberman
Isaac Herrmann
Kayla Miller
Jay Shapiro
Jefferson Strait
Audrey Thier
Howard Saunders
Richard Dubow
Sally Gotlieb
Lori Guy
Robert Werbel

April Birthdays

Dena Drasin
Lauren Gotlieb
Lawrence Weber
Deborah Rothschild
Carol Jacobs
Rose Gotlieb
Matthew Hogan
Jonah Marshall
Jane A. W. S. Shiyah
Marsha Altschuler
Alina Fein
Beth Wees
Susan Welsch
Barbara Goldstein
Maisie Lentzner
Ruth Levin
Sophie Lane
Sarah Elizabeth Apkin
Sarah Miller
Simon Wineberg
Laura Schoenbaum

Next Newsletter

Due date for submissions is April 10th. Send to plipman@fairpoint.net with "May/June Newsletter" in the subject line.

Congregation Beth Israel
53 Lois Street
North Adams MA 01247

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS & PHONE NUMBERS

Office:
Monday - Friday
10am - 1pm

Phone & Fax (413) 663-5830
E-mail cbioffice@verizon.net

Rabbi's Study:
Mondays 9am-3:30pm
Fridays 9am-4pm
(meditation minyan 9am)

*Please make an appointment to see the
Rabbi.*

Phone (413) 822-5267
E-mail rabbibarenblat@gmail.com

March April Newsletter deadline is Feb 10!

Rabbi: Rachel Barenblat
President: Pattie Lipman
Synagogue Administrator: Jack Hockridge
Newsletter Editor: Pattie Lipman plipman@fairpoint.net