

B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation

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JANUARY 2021

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TIVET/SHEVAT 5781

***B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation is a Brit Olam Congregation in covenant with the world
– because we seek the world we want, not the world as it is.***

JOIN US FOR PRAYER, MEDITATION, CELEBRATION AND STUDY

Zoom links for services are sent out weekly.

Please call the office for information about telephone access to prayer services.

Friday, January 1	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, January 2	TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI KATZ	9:00-9:45 AM*
	LAY-LED TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, January 8	TOT SHABBAT SERVICE	5:00 PM
	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, January 9	TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI KATZ	9:00-9:45 AM*
	LAY-LED TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Sunday, January 10	A Journey of Liberal Judaism	10:00 AM
Friday, January 15	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, January 16	TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI KATZ	9:00-9:45 AM*
	LAY-LED TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, January 22	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, January 23	TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI KATZ	9:00-9:45 AM*
	LAY-LED TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Wednesday, January 27	TuB'shevat Seder	5:30 PM
Friday, January 29	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, January 30	TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI KATZ	9:00-9:45 AM*
	LAY-LED TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, February 5	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, February 6	TORAH STUDY WITH RABBI KATZ	9:00-9:45 AM*
	LAY-LED TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM

**Unless otherwise noted in the weekly announcements.*

Visit <https://reformjudaism.org/learning> for each week's parashah.

B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation, a Reform Jewish synagogue, is a community that fosters individual, family and congregational spirituality by engaging in worship and prayer, promoting learning on all levels, supporting each other's needs, bettering our community and our world, and forging connections with worldwide Jewry.

We take pride in being warm, welcoming, informal, progressive, open-minded, diverse, and participatory.

We strive to create a vibrant Jewish present, linking our ancient traditions with the promise of the future.

FROM OUR RABBI...

January is going to be quite a month, a month of new beginnings. Did you know that the Jewish calendar as described in the Talmud actually has four new years? Listen:

THERE ARE FOUR NEW YEARS 1) ON THE FIRST OF NISAN IS NEW YEAR FOR KINGS AND FOR FESTIVALS, 2) ON THE FIRST OF ELUL IS NEW YEAR FOR THE TITHE OF CATTLE, (R. ELEAZAR AND R. SIMEON, HOWEVER, PLACE THIS ON THE FIRST OF TISHRI.) 3) ON THE FIRST OF TISHRI IS NEW YEAR FOR YEARS FOR RELEASE [OF SLAVES] AND JUBILEE YEARS AND FOR PLANTATION AND FOR [TITHE OF] VEGETABLES. 4) ON THE FIRST OF SHEAT IS NEW YEAR FOR TREES (ACCORDING TO THE RULING OF BETH SHAMMAI. BETH HILLEL, HOWEVER, PLACE IT ON THE FIFTEENTH OF THAT MONTH.)

TALMUD: ROSH HASHANAH MISHNAH 1.1

Apparently, there was a day of the year when coronations were to occur (the first day of the month of Nisan); when taxes were due, i.e. tithing (the first day of the month of Elul); when beginning the counting of days and months (the first day of the month of Tishri); and a day for the birthday of trees, like Arbor Day, (on the fifteenth of Shevat).

There are parallels here, are there not? On January 1, we take joy as the secular new year begins, on January 15 estimated taxes are due, on the 20th of January we will watch the inauguration of President-Elect Joe Biden and on Wednesday night, January 27, at 5:30 p.m. our synagogue community will observe Tu B'shevat, the birthday of the trees. We're not releasing slaves, as the Talmud mentions, but with new vaccines being administered to conquer COVID, many of us will be less homebound.

This last year has been difficult, to say the least. In so many ways we have been challenged, especially when it comes to our altered experiences of time and space. Going out into the world simply to shop has been a dangerous enterprise. Re-imagining prayer space on Zoom has been a major adjustment. Even the feeling of Mondays versus Wednesdays has been confusing because long-time routines have been changed. I, for one, am not going to work in the morning and coming back for dinner in the evening. One moment has been flowing into the next. I feel like I have been floating.

So I'm looking forward to any significant marker of time that is filled with appreciation or hope, and during this January there are many. Each new beginning is going to bring me pleasure and make me smile. (OK, maybe not filing my taxes, but every other marker.) I'm going to appreciate every day and I'm going to enjoy it.

Let's all celebrate this month, as we read in Psalms: "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." (Ps.118:24)

L'shalom,

Rabbi Katz

FROM OUR PRESIDENT...

As I write, I've just listened to Albany County Executive Dan McCoy's daily briefing concerning COVID-19. It's hard to listen to these briefings. Every day, McCoy and Elizabeth Whalen come out and report distressing statistics on our county crisis, marking losses and warning that things are likely to get worse before they get better. They beg our county residents to stay home, use good hygiene, wear masks and avoid exposure. They know, though, that even as they say these things, a handful of people watching on Facebook are posting comments denying the severity of the crisis, brushing off tragic losses as being inevitable due to age or poor health conditions, and sullenly refusing to take precautions because of misguided beliefs in their freedoms. We stand at a difficult moment, poised between the fear of what is to come and the hopeful sight of a vaccine. As we stand here, we see on one side acts of extraordinary sacrifice and community support juxtaposed against acts of willful ignorance and selfishness.

Public health experts warned us that the nation would face the most difficult and destructive public health crisis it has ever endured on the national level. We have seen this prediction come to fruition in this darkest of winters. As we have faced this crisis, we've done so alone in many regards, with many of us physically separated from beloved family members and friends but consumed with anxiety on our own and their behalf. Yet at the same time, we have been comforted by the actions we have taken to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, and now we can see a tangible future, when a vaccine will be available and competent plans can be developed to deliver it in an efficient and equitable manner.

This period coincides in a curious way with our Jewish calendar. Like many major religions, we mark the darkest time of the year, celebrating Chanukah when the days are the shortest and even the moon hides its light. We celebrate in fiery defiance, commemorating our refusal to bow before forces that appeared to be overwhelming. With our chanukiot, we signaled visibly to ourselves and the world the growth of light and joy even in the darkest and most difficult moments. This year, Chanukah carried an additional message for us. The origin story of the holiday has the Maccabees celebrating their victory over the Seleucid Empire by rededicating the Temple and observing the communal Sukkot festival together in joy a few months late . . . when it was finally safe to do so.

Looking ahead, the upcoming holiday this month is the minor holiday of Tu B'shevat, the new year of the trees. In our generation, many Jews have infused this holiday with a new sensibility of environmental awareness, something that probably works a little better for Jews like us who live in climates where no one is planting any trees in January or early February. This year, though, we may also be able to see Tu B'shevat as a moment of positive anticipation, when the seeds of our recovery and restoration are planted, and we can begin to heal from our long and difficult journey.

What fruits can this year bring to us? What can we cultivate in our own lives and in the life of our community? We have done so much in the last several months to recreate our communal life and make it meaningful and vibrant. I hope that as you read these words, you can think about these questions in ways that help you to envision a better time coming soon. We will, like trees, look forward to sprouting new leaves and branches. We will also keep the ring of memory we have made this year close to our hearts and save with gratitude the good things we have learned about ourselves and our congregation through this crisis.

L'shalom,

Julie Novkov

SPECIAL EVENT

"A Journey of Liberal Judaism: From the Capital Region to the Land of the Maccabees"

- A Q & A with Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon, moderated by Rabbi Katz
- Sunday , January 10, at 10 a.m. via Zoom

The first female congregational rabbi to serve in Israel, Kinneret Shiryon, went on to establish Kehillat Yozma, Modi'in's Reform congregation, the first non-Orthodox congregation to receive funding from the state. Born Sandra Levine, Rabbi Shiryon spent part of her childhood in Schenectady. A rabbinical school classmate of Rabbi Katz, Rabbi Shiryon made Aliyah in 1983. After founding Kehillat Yozma in 1997, she was the spiritual leader there for 20 years; today she is the rabbi emerita. Kehillat Yozma is known for its social justice partnerships and boasts the first Reform day school to receive state funding from the Israeli government. Rabbi Shiryon was the first woman to chair the Council of Progressive Rabbis in Israel and continues to be an outspoken advocate for Reform Judaism in Israel.

Please join us for this special opportunity to hear a pioneer of the movement provide her insights on the current challenges and successes of Progressive Judaism in Israel today.

Call or e-mail the synagogue to register and a link will be sent to you.

Come Outdoors with B'nai Sholom!

Do you find your spirituality in nature? Join us for one or more hour-long programs of sharing prayers and personal reflections, combined with walking or snowshoeing, at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar. Weather permitting, programs will take place at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays, January 3, 17 and 31, and February 14 and 28. Social distancing, masks and limits on group size will all be employed to ensure the safety of participants. Advance registration is required at least one day in advance so we can limit numbers if necessary and communicate regarding safety protocols and weather accommodations. Register by calling Libby Liebschutz at 518-466-7034 or emailing her at libbyliebschutz@gmail.com.

Update from the Rabbinic Search Committee

Last month we submitted our application for the $\frac{3}{4}$ -time Settled Rabbi position to the Rabbinical Placement Commission. The Commission – comprised of the CCAR, the HUC-JIR and the URJ – works with congregations belonging to the URJ to place rabbis and ensures the search process is conducted fairly and with dignity. We have received one application to date and expect to receive additional resumes to review, after which we'll begin the interview process. In addition, we may consider applicants from the graduating class at HUC-JIR if they meet our needs. Completing the application was much easier thanks to input from the group conversations and the congregational survey.

We're looking forward to starting this next phase of our search process and will provide updates in the weekly announcements and on the website.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact committee co-chairs Carol Smith and David Liebschutz at rabsearch@bnaisholom.albany.ny.us.

Thanks once again for your support in this vitally important process!

Carol Smith and David Liebschutz, co-chairs
Rabbinic Search Committee

News from the Social Action/Social Justice Committee

New York Religious Action Center (RAC-NY) of Reform Judaism

RAC-NY, the Reform Jewish movement's statewide social justice effort, continues to grow and work to involve more Reform congregations and Reform Jews to move New York closer to the Jewish values of wholeness, justice and compassion. In the coming year, there will be more opportunities for us to help lead RAC-NY toward greater social justice impact.

Please join us in representing our congregation at one of two webinars sponsored by **RAC-NY**. During these sessions, you will hear about potential **RAC-NY** state legislative campaigns and weigh in on which campaign you most want to work on. Register now for one of these two identical webinars and help shape **RAC-NY's** 2021 social justice work:

- * **January 13 at noon** – www.rac.org/NYselection1
- * **January 14 at 7 pm** -- www.rac.org/NYselection2

Please register for whichever one is most convenient for you. The more people from our congregation who join the webinars, the more influence we will have on **RAC-NY's** 2021 social justice work.

If you would like to learn more about RAC or discuss your participation in a webinar, please contact Gail Volk gvolk53@gmail.com.

News from the Fundraising Committee

We would like to thank all those who participated in the virtual Fair Trade/Judaica sale. Our partners in this event, Mayan Hands, the Women's Peace Collection and Eeema's Beads, are grateful for your support and were very pleased with the results. Your participation helped bolster their ability to continue in their efforts, including giving opportunities to economically and socially marginalized women in Guatemala and around the world. Don't forget you can always shop with them online at www.mayanhands.org, www.womenspeacecollection.com and <https://eeemas-beads.com/>

We would also like to thank the vendors for allowing us to partner with them. We look forward to next year when hopefully we can resume our in-house fair with all our vendors!

CONGRATULATIONS to Jody Squadere who won the December holiday gift basket! The next gift basket will be raffled at the end of January. See page 6 for more information.

B'nai Sholom's Fundraising Committee is sponsoring a Relaxation Gift Basket Raffle

Now's your chance to win the January/February Relaxation Gift Basket worth over \$300!



The basket includes a gift certificate for a massage, a pampering set of bath and body products, candles, notecards, *The Band's Visit* CD, a \$100 Visa gift card, a Dunkin' Donuts gift card and the preparation of one tax return by Shari Whiting, CPA.

Raffle tickets are \$2 each, 3 for \$5 or \$20 for the full sheet. Cut out the tickets you are purchasing and complete each with your name, email address and phone number. Send the completed tickets with your check to B'nai Sholom **no later than January 29**. The drawing will be held promptly after that date, and the winner will be notified.

Parsha VAYISHLACH – Genesis 32:4-36:43

D'var Torah by Susan Aron - THE SOUND OF SILENCE

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Delivered by Susan at the December Board of Trustees meeting)

In this parsha, we learn that Jacob reconciles with his brother, Esau, after wrestling with a “man” or angel/G-d after which he is given the name Israel. He and his family travel to the city of Shechem. Dinah, Jacob’s only daughter, goes out into the city to greet the women and is raped by the prince of Shechem. Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, then deceive the prince and all the men of Shechem by requiring that they all be circumcised so that they can attack when the men are weak and sack the city in revenge for the rape of their sister.

I gave much thought to the silence surrounding the rape of Dinah and what can be heard through silence. Reading the parsha and several commentaries, it is important to note that this is the only mention of Dinah in the entire Bible; and Dinah herself says not a word. This silence, the lack of a dialogue between Dinah and either her father or her brothers, is deafening.

There is further silence when Jacob learns of the rape; he says and does nothing, waiting instead for his sons to return from the field. Jacob learns that the prince wants to marry Dinah. Hearing this, Simeon and Levi then conspire to deceive the prince in retribution for defiling their sister. They tell the prince that for Dinah to marry an uncircumcised man would be an abomination and that he could marry her only on the condition that he and all the men of the city are circumcised.

The prince agrees that all the men will be circumcised so they can intermingle and that is where the brothers’ deception begins. Simeon and Levi wait until the third day after the circumcision when the pain is said to be greatest and the men are at their weakest, and they then attack the city. In an ultimate act of irony, they take the women of the city in revenge.

Earlier in the parsha we learn of the great lengths that Jacob goes to in order to separate his family into two armies in apprehension of how his meeting with Esau will go and in case he is attacked. Yet, when he learns that Dinah has been raped, there is only silence. Thereafter, when Jacob learns what Simeon and Levi have done, he is upset about how those actions will reflect on him. Again, not a word or thought of the effect of the whole event on Dinah.

Now, it would certainly be foolish not to acknowledge that these writings were written by men at a time when women were voiceless, as a matter of course, and while society has made great progress, there remain times in more modern history when reactions have been the same as in this story and where silence prevailed.

Many commentaries say this is the most disturbing parsha in the Torah. In reading the parsha we are uncomfortable with the story and by the reactions after the rape; by Jacob’s silence, as well as the hypocrisy of the brothers in pillaging the city and taking the women against their will. Some commentators view this discomfort as a sign of positive change.

However, we have seen that over time women, be they victims of rape or otherwise, have been silenced by family members for the sake of how an event would reflect on the family. Just a few generations ago, families sent away a young woman who became pregnant out of wedlock to have it “taken care of” and to spare the family shame, all too often not listening to what the young woman might want or need. This continues today, as we still hear of honor killings or female genital mutilation for the sake of the family without regard for the young woman herself.

(Continued on page 8.)

(Continued from page 7.)

The silence of both Dinah and Jacob here also made me think of today's political climate and silence. Just as we do not know what Dinah was feeling or wanted, whether this was really a rape or a consensual act, we also do not know what Jacob was feeling and why he was silent. Was it apathy or pain that stole his words?

Far too often, we talk more than we listen; we create an entire narrative around either someone's words or their silence, one that fits neatly into our own beliefs. We talk of our own needs and beliefs to build such narratives without ever really listening to either what the person says with their words or by their silence. Often, what someone does not say is more important than what they do say. It reminds me of the line from the Broadway show "Hamilton," when Aaron Burr tells Alexander Hamilton to "Talk less; smile more."

Just as Dinah's silence in this parsha is deafening, so too is the silence of today. But, perhaps we can allow positive change to come from this silence. Instead of only talking and assigning our own narratives to the words or thoughts of others, perhaps we could find common ground and compromise, if we were only willing to listen. Instead of perpetuating violence or apathy, we might strive not only to listen to others, but also to tell those who are silent that we are willing to listen and thereby give them the ability to break their silence and speak their own words.

Membership Committee Delivers Chanukah Greetings

In early December, the Membership Committee arranged for all local congregants and other B'nai Sholom friends to receive small gift bags containing a box of Chanukah candles, a bag of chocolate gelt and a dreidel "with warm wishes from B'nai Sholom for a bright and happy Chanukah." According to committee chair Libby Liebschutz, the committee thought it would be a great way to help foster a connection to congregants during a dark, cold COVID season. "I'm not sure it would have occurred to us to deliver them all by hand," Libby said, "if the past presidents hadn't done that at the High Holidays, delivering bags of challah, apples and honey. We got a really enthusiastic response to our call for volunteers. I think both the delivery crew and many of the recipients appreciated the opportunity to have even brief face-to-face encounters with others." Many thanks to Libby Liebschutz, Nancy Rudinger and Dawn Wallant for assembling the bags; to Christine Blackman for supplying the labels; and to Josh Brody, Ellie Davis, Jasmine Fleischer, Judy Fruiterman, Terry Kindlon, Steve Klein, Libby Liebschutz, Rich and Barbara Nussbaum, Stacey Pacuk, Cheryl and Mark Reeder, Marilyn Spencer, Bill and Sheila Schwartz, Shari Whiting, and Matt Zaremsky for making the deliveries.

January Kibbutzniks

Carol and Doug Smith – In gratitude for the work of the B'nai Sholom Board of Trustees, committees, other volunteers, Christine and Rabbi Katz. We appreciate all that you do to keep the synagogue moving forward.

Amy Sternstein – With heartfelt gratitude to Ellie and Randy Davis for putting in countless hours helping me go through my mom's things in preparation for the estate sale.

Amy Sternstein – In appreciation of Maxine, Eric and Ethan Goldberg for the delicious Thanksgiving dinner.

The Congregation Notes with Thanks These Contributions

General Fund

In memory of **Harvey Tress** by Shelley M. Drazen.

In memory of **Harvey Tress** by David and Libby Liebschutz.

In memory of **Harvey Tress** by Becky and Ben Marvin.

In memory of **Harvey Tress** by Marlene Baker Glass.

In memory of **Judy Dobris** by The Family of Judy Dobris.

In memory of her father, **Alfred Watman**, by Linda Finkle.

In honor of **Rabbi Katz with gratitude for his support during Jesse's hospitalizations and throughout his current rehabilitation process** by Valerie Tabak and Jesse Dinkin.

In appreciation of **Rabbi Katz, the voices of Libby Liebschutz, Melissa Putterman Hoffmann, Lenora Pfeffer and the Caring Community** by Marcia, Samantha and Daniel Tress.

In memory of her parents, **Ida and Emery Sennesh**, by Amy Vastola.

In memory of his father, **Jack Pendergrass**, by Barry Pendergrass.

In honor of **Randy and Ellie Davis** by Amy Sternstein.

Social Action Fund

In honor of **Gail Volk, for her commitment to the New York Chapter of the League of Women Voters and for all of her hard work in organizing B'nai Sholom's participation in the Reclaim Our Vote postcard writing initiative** by Valerie Tabak and Jesse Dinkin.

In appreciation of **Lois Gordon** by Marcia Tress.

In honor of **The Social Action Committee's Get Out the Vote Campaign** by Stephen and Jeanette Gottlieb.

In appreciation of **Valerie Tabak's and Becky Marvin's unwavering and wise leadership of the Social Action Committee** by Gail Volk.

The following Yahrts will be observed in January:

1/1 Roberta Minzer; Olaf "Sonny" Hausgaard; Lore (Laurie) Lee; Rachel Trombley Porter; Benjamin Sacks; Irving Goodman*; Michael Leon Kramer*; Vera Winston Propp*; Gerald Davis; Jean Pacuk; Joseph Velk*; Walter L. Hock, Jr.; Julian Wager

1/8 Eleanor Marvin; Kitty Lazoroff*; Sylvia Brownstein; Mortimer Henry Englander*; Ethel Horowitz; Avraham Koren*; Minnie Edel*; Martin Loeb*; Tobey Katz; Theron Vosburgh; Janice Kerper; Bertha Ginsburg

1/15 Leo Cabelly; Rena Bach*; Harold M. Smuckler*; Bertha Friedman; Allan B. Cashman

1/22 Marion Hock*; William Smith; Bernard Smith; Elizabeth Nelson Mutschler*; Ronald Weisdorffer; Allen Heffler

1/29 Aaron David Stoller*; Ida Shapiro Jaffe*; Sandra Samuels; Leonard Samuels; Irving Schwartz; Sylvia Schwartz; Isaac Adels*; Ethel Hesch Berke*; Lillian Hammer*; Frank Weinberg*; Morris Alowitz*; Roz Walker*; Jack Jarett; Arthur Katz; Esther Rosenberg*; Bernard Royne; Ethel Strohl

**denotes that a Perpetual Memorial has been established.*

Thank You

.....to Amy Sternstein, Ellie Davis, Anne Hausgaard and Lois Gordon who completed various office projects for the office manager.

..... to the Bulletin Brigade – Joe DeFronzo, Jim Savitt, Rema Goldstein, Mark and Cheryl Reeder and Anne Hausgaard – who helped fold and stuff the December bulletin.

RABBI: David Katz can be reached at rabbidavidkatz18@gmail.com

RABBI EMERITUS: Donald P. Cashman

PRESIDENT: Julie Novkov can be reached at julienovkov@hotmail.com

OFFICE MANAGER: Christine Blackman can be reached at christine@bnaisholom.albany.ny.us

BOOKKEEPER: Jean Dashnaw can be reached at bookbnaisholom@gmail.com

OFFICE HOURS: TUE/WED/THURS/FRI 9:30 AM–3:30 PM

Articles and news received after the deadline are subject to omission.

As a rule, the Bulletin deadline is the 2nd Wednesday of every month. Adherence to the deadline is critical to ensuring that the Bulletin is sent out in a timely manner.

<u>Period Covered</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
February.....	January 13
March.....	February 10