



Bethesda Jewish Congregation News

Hazzan Sunny Schnitzer

December 2009

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Hazzan's Call—Kriat HaHazzan

Hazzan Sunny Schnitzer

The Jew is a Lamplighter on the Streets of the World

There is a wonderful story of a conversation between a rabbi and a member of his community. The man asked: "Rabbi, what is a Jew's task in this world?" The rabbi answered: "A Jew is a lamplighter on the streets of the world."

The rabbi continued, "In the old days, there was a person in every town who would light the gas street lamps with a light he carried on the end of a long pole with a flame supplied by the town. He knew that the fire is not his own and he went around lighting the lamps on his route."

The man then asked: "But what if the lamp is in a desolate wilderness?" The rabbi responded: "Then, too, one must light it."

Not satisfied, the man asked: "But what if the lamp is in the middle of the sea?" to which the rabbi responded: "Then the lamplighter must take off his clothes, jump into the water, and light it there!"

"And that is the Jew's mission?" asked the man. The rabbi thought for a long moment and finally responded: "Yes, that is a Jew's calling." The man persisted: "But rabbi, I see no lamps." The rabbi responded: "That is because you are not yet a lamplighter." "So," the man inquires, "how does one become a lamplighter?"

The rabbi's answered, "One must begin with oneself, cleansing oneself, becoming more refined. Then one is able to see the other as a source of light, waiting to be ignited. When your soul burns with the light of kindness and compassion, then you can see others longing to burst into light, yearning to help illumine and warm the world. You become a lamplighter—one who lights the hearts and

souls of others."

On Hanukkah we should remember as we light our lights in our homes, that we are not lighting these lights only for ourselves, only to remember a piece of Jewish history, only to affirm our identity, but for the entire world.

Most of us are familiar with the blessings said by the person lighting the candles. What is less well known is that there is also a blessing for one who is not lighting. Upon seeing the Hanukkah candles burning, the one who did not light makes a blessing "on the miracles that were done for our fathers."

It is unique to the festival of Hanukkah that someone not performing the mitzvah makes a blessing just on seeing a mitzvah done by others. This is why the Talmud insists that our hanukiot, our Hanukkah menorahs, be visible from the street. The candles were made a public display for everyone's sake.

When a Jew who, upon seeing the lights burning, is aroused by them to

BJC News

Bethesda Jewish Congregation
6601 Bradley Boulevard
Bethesda, MD 20817-3042
Tel: 301-469-8636
Fax: 301-469-9529
www.bethesdajewish.org
admin@bethesdajewish.org



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take a renewed interest in his Jewish identity, and the mission of the Jew in the world, it is a special mitzvah for all.

May we all cause our lights to burn bright. May our deeds of loving kindness for our families, ourselves, the poor, the homeless, and the oppressed, shine brightly in this season.

A Thought or Two . . . From the President

Edward Stern

Judah Maccabeus in Green, Red, and Gold

The green, red, and gold decorations common at the time of the Winter solstice are pretty. There is also a good story behind them. The origin of these colors may not be what you think.

The beginning of winter sees the celebration of Christmas and Hanukkah. Most Jews and some Christians know that there would be no Christmas, if there were no Hanukkah. It's simple. Antiochus IV (c.215-163 BC), also known as Antiochus Epiphanes, Emperor of Syria, tried to wipe out the Jewish religion. The forces of Antiochus IV robbed and desecrated the Temple of Jerusalem. That prompted Mattathias of Modin, his five sons, and many followers to begin a guerrilla war against the tyrant. When Mattathias died, his son, Judah Maccabeus, became the leader of the revolt. You probably know the rest of the Hanukkah story, with the lights. Most people don't know the part about the colors.

First, you must remember that, two thousand years ago, the hills of Judea were covered with trees. The hills are bare now, because all the trees were cut down during the occupation of the Ottoman Turkish Empire from 1516 to 1917. These thick green forests were very important to Judah Maccabeus and his troops. They were hiding in those forests when they were not attacking the Syrian forces.

Antiochus had a large professional army with plenty of chariots. When you are on foot, it is pretty scary to see a chariot coming at you. A chariot was

a powerful weapon on flat ground. But you can't use chariots to chase people in the forest, and Judah knew that.

To make things harder for Antiochus' troops, Judah told his people to wear clothes that blended in with the trees. It's hard to find a man in green clothes in a green forest. Judah must have been pleased at how well this worked.

Antiochus' general denounced Judah's camouflage as cowardly. He told his troops not to worry because Judah was such a coward that he hid in the woods! The word got back to the rebels and some of them got sucked in by this psychological warfare, as the general had intended. (He was plenty shrewd.)

Soon afterward, the general held up a large gold coin before his troops and announced that whoever captured Judah Maccabeus would have it as a special reward from the Emperor. You might think that one gold coin wasn't such a big deal, but in those days it could buy food for a family for six months, maybe more.

The offer of the big gold coin also rattled some of Judah's troops. They were already up against a powerful army. Now, their inexperienced leader had been called a coward and he had a big price on his head.

Judah needed to rally the spirits of his men. He called them together, and brought out a couple of captured Syrian soldiers. He said: "Antiochus complains because he cannot find us. He even calls me a coward. Well, I will still wear the green clothes of my men, but to make it easier for Antiochus I will also wear this red vest." (It might have been a big scarf or something like that).

The troops laughed at Judah's mocking the Emperor, and took heart to see how bold he was. The Syrian captives must have thought he was crazy. (There is nothing in the writings on this, it's my own view.) But Judah was not finished.

We do not have Judah's exact words, but his message should be clear even now 2165 years later. He reached into the bag of coins that was the treasury for the war effort. He pulled out a large gold coin, the same as the reward for his capture, and held it up for all to see. Then he went over to an anvil. He put down the coin and picked up a large hammer. He knew very well how to handle a hammer; his nickname was Judah "the hammer."

With a mighty blow, he squashed the gold coin, smashing the face of the Emperor on the coin. This, of course, was an insult to Antiochus. Gold is soft metal and stretches easily. With a couple of blows, Judah flattened it out into a shiny gold disk, as big as his hand. Then, he punched a little hole in it and ran a cord through it. He

held it up toward the Syrian captives, and put it around his neck. It seems that he was saying, "the Emperor has offered only one gold coin for my capture, so whoever finds me can have this one, too!" Then he released the Syrian soldiers so they could go back and tell this story. The troops must have gone wild.

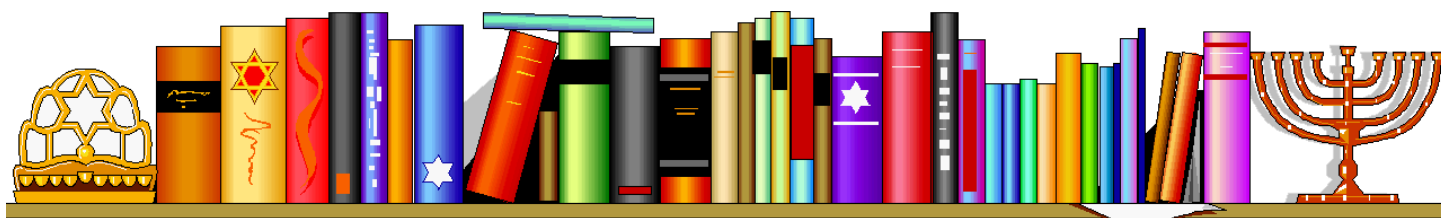
This must have been good psychology for the troops, because eventually they did beat Antiochus' forces. In the meantime, wearing the red vest (or scarf) and the big gold medallion put Judah at greater risk. A red vest really stands out in a green forest. And the flashy medallion could also catch your eye.

Antiochus' soldiers were eager to go after Judah to collect the Emperor's coin and the one on Judah's neck. The pious people who supported the war were concerned for Judah's safety. Someone, we don't know who, came up with the idea of attaching strips of red cloth, like ribbons, on the trees scattered through the forests. When the wind blew, the ribbons moved like Judah running through the trees. Some folks tied flashy things, like pieces of metal or broken

glass, to the trees to catch the eye like Judah's medallion. It was a good trick on the Syrian soldiers, and it was good strategy. The more they looked, the more they got lost in the forest. That wasn't good for them.

As you know, the Maccabees did finally beat the Syrian troops. The people continued to put red ribbons and flashy things on the green trees about the time of the Winter Solstice, to remember Judah Maccabeus and the struggle. People still put red ribbons and flashy things on trees. Although, it seems to be more of a Christian than Jewish practice now days. I think a lot of people just forgot what happened.

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Sh'ma Koli—Hear My Voice

Chava Gal-Or, Director of Congregation Education

BJC Intergenerational Hanukkah Program**

Ahad Ha'am taught us that, "Learning, learning, learning is the key to Jewish survival."

Join us on Saturday, Dec. 12 for an interactive Hanukkah Celebration and Day of Learning. This program is for all BJC members whether you have children in the Religious School or you just want to learn yourself.

- Adults will begin at 9:45 a.m. in the session of your choice
- Grades K through 4 will have a Day of Hanukkah Celebrations including arts and crafts.
- Grades 5 and up will choose one of the session/activities below (hopefully with a mom or dad). Please take a moment to look at the options before arriving at BJC.

Please note: Religious School will start at the usual time.

Session Options—9:45 –11 a.m.

- Hazzan Sunny Schnitzer will present **The Real Story of Hanukkah: Viva La Revolucion!** A Model of Jewish Civil Disobedience. Shabbat Worship will follow.

- Glenn Siegal—**Interactive Miracles Workshop/Debate** – How can the miracles of Hanukkah and other Torah stories have happened? What do we learn from the teachings? As Jews and non-Jews, it is our job to question each story. Could the miracles of each story actually have happened? Maybe they did, maybe not. Does it really matter? What is the point of the story? We will discuss if there is any phenomena that made the story possible and what we learn from each of the stories.

Continued on page 4

- Renee and Mark—**Intergenerational Storytelling Workshop**—Intergenerational storytelling connects young and old through personal and community stories. *We are the Stories We Tell*. Celebrate Hanukkah with stories, but not the story of Hanukkah, necessarily. Explore the world of Jewish folk tales in a fun, fast-paced storytelling workshop. Delight your friends and family—and have a really good time. Learn to lift a story off the printed page and help it fly.
- Michael Grossman—**Hanukkah: Dedication for Today**—Participants will utilize improvisation and role playing to take the lessons of Hanukkah and apply them to how we live today. Topics will include civil disobedience, armed resistance, religious freedom, and Tikkun Olam.
- Chava Gal-Or—**Hanukkah: A Green Holiday?**—How do we tie Hanukkah to the car-

ing for our environment?; What new Hanukkah traditions can we create to make the holiday green?; Can gifts—be more green and meaningful?; and We'll look at "8 Days—8 Actions for Doing Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)."

11-11:25 a.m.—Students go to classes; Micha Mocha Café will be open with coffee and donuts.

11:30 a.m.-12 p.m.—Back by popular demand, storytelling with Renee Brachfeld and Mark Novak

12:15 p.m. Latke lunch will follow. Cost \$5/person. Please send RSVP or regrets to chava@bethesdajewish.org.

**BJC's Intergenerational Hanukkah Program was made possible by a special grant, the Initiative in Congregational Education, from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. This gift has allowed us to expand our programming for all members.

From Hazzan Schnitzer

Please be in touch with me in times of joy, sadness or illness in your life or in the lives of a loved one or another member of the congregation. This is particularly necessary now that the HIPAA regulations have made getting any kind of information from the hos-

pitals extremely difficult. I greatly appreciate your help in keeping me informed of the health needs of our congregation. Office Number: 301-469-8636, #3.

Congregation News

Parents of 2012 B'nai Mitzvah: Important Meeting to Choose Your Dates!

Join us on Saturday Dec. 5, 12:45 p.m. in the Lounge. A light lunch will be served.

Adult Education: Living into Timimut (Simplicity)—Jewish Tools to Simplify Your Life

Join Chava Gal-Or on Thursday, Dec. 7 from 7:30-9 p.m. to learn how to incorporate voluntary simplicity in your everyday life. In this time of over-scheduled chaos, many of us are contemplating options for making our lives more spiritual and meaningful. Two major teachings will be considered *b'tzelem elohim*.

BJC Congregational and New Member Dinner

Please join us on Friday, Dec. 18 at 6:30 p.m. when we welcome our new members and Shabbat with dinner followed by our Simcha B'Shabbat service. It is the last night of Hanukkah so bring your menorahs and candles and let us all celebrate! (New members attend at no charge and will receive invitations.)

- Fee: \$18 adults, \$11 children ages 6-12; children under 6 free.*
- Reservations by Dec. 10
- RSVP: BJC office 301-469-8636 or admin@bethesdajewish.org

*Fee after Dec 10 or at the door: \$20 adults, \$13 children ages 6-12.



December 2009 Calendar



Day	Date	Time	Event	Location
Wednesday	Dec. 2	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Thursday	Dec. 3	7:30 p.m.	Adult Ed-Living w/ Simplicity with Chava Gal-Or	Lounge
Friday	Dec. 4	8:00 p.m.	N'Tivim L' Shabbat—Music Service	Covenant Hall
Saturday	Dec. 5	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 9:45 a.m. 10:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.	Adult Hebrew Religious School Sandwich Making Religious School Shabbat Worship Class of 2012-Parents Meeting	Lounge Classrooms Memorial Hall Classrooms Covenant Hall Lounge
Wednesday	Dec. 9	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Friday	Dec. 11	6:30 p.m. 7:30 p.m.	Family & Friends Shabbat Service Pot Luck Shabbat Dinner First Night of Hanukkah	Covenant Hall Memorial Hall
Saturday	Dec. 12	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 9:45 a.m. 10:30 a.m. 4:30 p.m.	Adult Hebrew Ed Stern's Adult Ed Religious School Religious School Shabbat Worship Chant Circle	Lounge Outer Office Classrooms Classrooms Covenant Hall RM 305
Wednesday	Dec. 16	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Friday	Dec. 18	6:30 p.m. 8:00 p.m.	Congregational/New Member Dinner Simcha B'Shabbat	Memorial Hall Covenant Hall
Saturday	Dec. 19	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 9:45 a.m. 10:30 a.m.	Adult Hebrew Religious School Religious School Shabbat Worship	Lounge Classrooms Classrooms Covenant Hall
Tuesday	Dec. 22	7:30 p.m.	Cuba Trip Orientation and Reunion	Lounge
Wednesday	Dec. 23	6:30 p.m. 8:00 p.m.	NO Religious School Kemach and Torah Open Book Discussion: <i>Birds Without Wings</i>	Library Library
Friday	Dec. 25	8:00 p.m.	Shabbat Worship	Covenant Hall
Saturday	Dec. 26		No Religious School No Shabbat Worship	
Wednesday	Dec. 30	6:30 p.m.	No Religious School Kemach and Torah	Library
Friday	Jan 1	8:00 p.m.	Shabbat Worship	Covenant Hall
Saturday	Jan 2	10:30 a.m.	No Religious School Shabbat Worship	Covenant Hall
Wednesday	Jan 6	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library

Cuba Mission Reunion and Orientation

Come together on Tuesday, Dec. 22 at 7:30 p.m. with friends who have visited Cuba with BJC in years past as we share our photos, tschatchkes, and stories. Have a taste of Cuban life with morros y christianos (beans and rice), plantains and mojitos. Come and see how the children and the communities have grown. This will also serve as the orientation mission for BJC members making their first trip to Cuba in Feb.

Open Book Discussion: *Birds Without Wings*

Join us on Dec. 23 at 8 p.m. for a discussion of *Birds Without Wings* by Louis de Bernieres. The book begins in the early 1900s in an idyllic town in southwest Turkey in the declining years of the Ottoman Empire. The people are a mix of Greek and Turkish, Muslim and Christian, and they live harmoniously in a simple life unfettered by outside forces. The beautiful Philothei, who is Christian, loves the Muslim boy, Ibrahim. Rustem Bey, the local landlord, finds his wife with another man, murders her lover, and drags her to the town square to be stoned, but the imam saves her.

Intertwined with stories of the townspeople is the history of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey. The rise of Turkish nationalism, the onset of World War I, the conscription of the local boys and men, the battle of Gallipoli and ethnic cleansing tear their world apart.

Drop-ins and new members are always welcome. Contact Evelyn Ganzglass at 202-966-7037 or Ruth Rosenberg at 703-560-9525 for more information.

Yahrzeits

יארצייט

Bernard Berkowitz, Father of Susan Berkowitz
Bernard Berman, Father of Louis Berman
Rita Beuchert, Aunt of Mary Beth Klotz

BJC Office Hours

Tues.-Thur 9:30-4:30 p.m., Fri. 9:30-3:00 p.m. Closed Sat., Sun., Mon. and Jewish Holidays. Messages won't be returned when the office is closed.



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Sara Stern, Grandmother of Melissa Keller

Thank you...

תודה רבה

Bruce and Wynne Busman for their generous donation in honor of the Yahrzeit of Bruce's father, Leonard Busman.

Bruce and Wynne Busman for their generous donation in memory of Norma Stern's father, Isadore Frankford.

Martin Freeman for his generous donation to the Hazzan's Discretionary Fund for the honor of carrying the Torah at Simchat Torah.

Roy and Michele Peck for their generous donation.

Lorrie Van Akkeren for her generous donation to the Hazzan's Discretionary Fund.

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Happy Chanukah

*If you know someone in need of
a miracle, we are here to help.*



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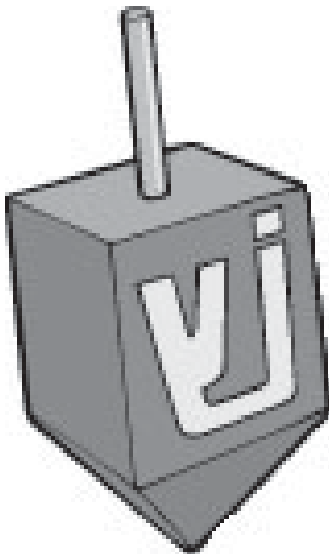
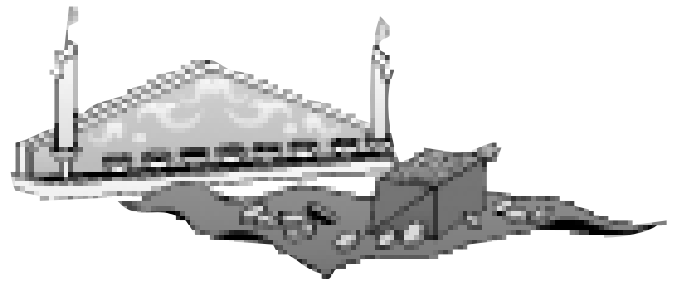


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Newsletter Editor: Anita Farb—anita.farb@gmail.com

**Design Layout and Desktop Publishing:
Yvonne Bryant**

The deadline for submitting articles for the Jan. newsletter is Dec. 4.

Please email your article in an MS Word attachment.

Put your ad in the BJC Newsletter

To place your card or other-sized ad in the Jan. newsletter, mail it to the BJC office with your check made payable to BJC.

Deadline: Dec. 4. Rate structure for a business card: \$20.00 per month, 3-month minimum. Rates are slightly higher for cards that are not camera-ready art.