



Bethesda Jewish Congregation News

Rabbi Elhanan 'Sunny' Schnitzer

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Kiriat HaRav—The Call of the Rabbi

Rabbi Elhanan 'Sunny' Schnitzer

Recently, one of our BJC members asked me a question about the Eight Degrees of Tsedakah (charity), so famously expounded by Rabbi Moses ben Maimon in his immortal work, Mishnah Torah. Sometimes he is known by the acronym, the RAMBAM or as Maimonedes, he organized the different levels of tzedakah (charity) into a list from the least to the most honorable. They are:

8. When donations are given grudgingly.
7. When one gives less than he should, but does so cheerfully.
6. When one gives directly to the poor upon being asked.
5. When one gives directly to the poor without being asked.
4. When the recipient is aware of the donor's identity, but the donor does not know the identity of the recipient.
3. When the donor is aware of the recipient's identity, but the recipient is unaware of the source.
2. When the donor and recipient are unknown to each other.
1. The highest form of charity is to help sustain a person before they become impoverished by offering a substantial gift in a dignified manner, or by extending a suitable loan, or by helping them find employment or establish themselves in business so as to make it unnecessary for them to become dependent on others. Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matanot L'Aniyim 10:7-12.

We teach the Rambam's principles to our religious school students in 6th grade and Tichon, but the question made me wonder—how many of the adult members of our congregation are aware of this timeless Jewish obligation?

Some of you have heard me say before that tzedakah for Jews is

not merely a nice thing to do, but is an obligation. Translating the word tzedakah as charity is a poor translation as the word literally means—righteousness. Tzedakah is a righteous action and it is one that we are commanded to perform most fervently. Our Torah commands us in Sefer Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:20: *Tsedek, Tsedek, Tirdoff—Righteousness, Righteousness, You Shall Pursue.*

Tsedek also means justice, so the pursuit of tzedek is an act that brings justice into the world. We are commanded to *pursue* this righteous justice, not merely to casually engage in the practice, but to engage fervently in it.

We live in an era in which the social safety net is under severe strain. Congress is focused on budget cuts, as opposed to a simpler more equitable tax system, in order to restore our country to fiscal stability. This budget axe will in all likelihood affect programs that protect the most vulnerable of our citizens. While direct emergency aid in the form of cash and food

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BJC News

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stamps continue, it is job training programs and other forms of indirect, but longer lasting relief that will in all likelihood suffer under the budget axe.

Within Maimonedes text, we find a similar tension about whether we treat people differently according to their financial history, and ambiguity about whether to focus on those in the greatest need or on those who are just now falling into poverty.

Rabbi Yaakov Ariel, a contemporary Israeli rabbi, has suggested that the commandment of *tzedakah* should be understood as two separate laws: an obligation for individuals to give *tzedakah* and an obligation for the state to end poverty. He bases this proposal on the classical division of

mitzvot into two categories: *h'ovot gavra* and *h'ovot h'eftza*. *H'ovot gavra* are mitzvot incumbent on individual people. In contrast, *h'ovot h'eftza* are mitzvot occasioned by particular objects. *Tsedakah*, is a *h'ovot gavra* insofar as every individual is obligated to give *tzedakah*. But, says Rabbi Ariel, *tzedakah* is also a *h'ovot h'eftza* in that the appearance of a poor person imposes an obligation on the community to care for the needs of this person. Individual members of society can help individuals to get by, to find jobs, or to secure loans. Only the government, though, can establish the pre-conditions for *tzedakah* to be effective.

Within a society that allows equal access to opportunity, well-paying jobs, and accessible paths to the middle class, the eighth level of *tzedakah* offers a sufficient response to individual poverty. But in a society in which large systems hamper economic mobility, individual solutions only go so far. Rather than ignoring this gap between our own reality and the reality that Rambam addresses, we might allow the eighth level of *tzedakah* to spur us to consider how to create a society in which self-sufficiency is the norm, and emergency support is the rare exception.

A Thought or Two...From the President

Edward Stern

We have begun a new secular year and I hope it will be a good year for everyone. (The Jewish New Year has always seemed more of a turning point for me, with the new Federal fiscal year, new school year, and new season.) Thinking of the new year brought to mind unfinished work with our "Enhancing the Flame" (ETF) funding raising effort.

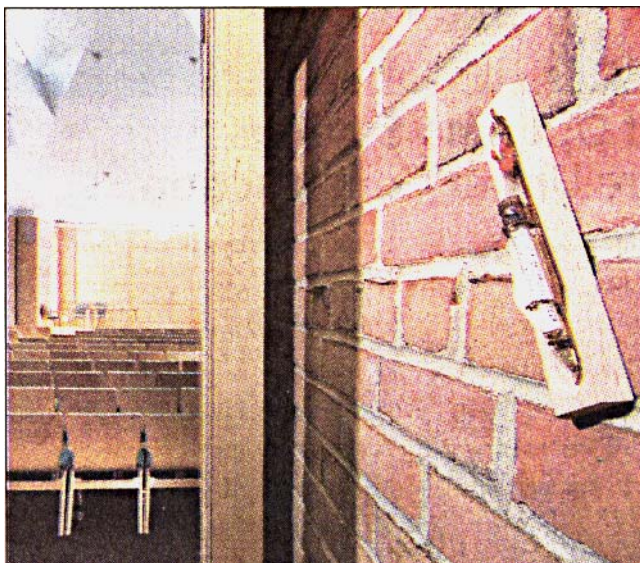
I cannot say enough to praise and to thank past President Harri Kramer for her imaginative leadership and

hard work on ETF. I must also thank those who worked with her to explain the purpose of, and need for, this fund-raising project. And I add my voice to that of immediate past President Karen Jerome in thanking the members and friends of the Congregation who made pledges and contributions to ETF.

That said, there is still work to do. The Enhancing the Flame funds give BJC a little financial security and some flexibility to do things that will enhance the life of the Congregation. Just weeks ago, we used some of the funds to purchase new prayer books, after a very thoughtful examination of possibilities by many members, led by the Rabbi.

Yet, we did not reach all of the old members and we have not reached many new members to talk about the need for their support for this effort. I encourage you to read more about it at www.bethesdajewish.org/support/etf.html.

Your support would help us achieve some desired goals, including purchase of another Torah, upgrading the Ner Tamid, our Eternal Light, improving our library, and endowing a speakers and program fund. This is something we need to get back to.





Sh'ma Koli—Hear My Voice

Chava Gal-Or, Director of Congregation Education

Our Sages have always equated 'prayer'—*"Tefilla"* with *"song"*—*"Shira"*, because the *"Gematria"*—the numerical value of the letters in both *Tefilla* and *Shira* adds up to 515! This leads to the statement of the Sages (Berachot 6a) that *"Wherever there is Song, there shall be Prayer"*, underlining their intrinsic commitment to the power of song in our *Tefillot*. When you sing along during davening you are reaffirming the importance of song in our *Tefillot*! (Origin unknown)

As I write, I am reflecting about what I have learned from Debbie Friedman who was considered the Peter, Paul, and Mary of the Jewish world. Debbie was the first songwriter to utilize Hebrew and English interpretations interchangeably so that our prayers are better understood. Each BJC worship service, the Rabbi leads our community in the prayer/song *Mishaberach*, the prayer for healing. The beautiful gift that Debbie has given us is the ability to turn prayer into song and therefore song into prayer.

The words touched me profoundly for three different reasons:

1. A beauty of BJC is the way our Rabbi leads our community in prayer through song.
2. If prayer and song are interchangeable, then our students can find joy in prayers through song. Can we both learn the Hebrew while finding the song that touches us? I think so. I need to help our educational program develop that kind of attitude.
3. Let us all try to bring this teaching into our homes. Sometimes when I do my morning prayers, I find myself weaving a song into my heart and creating my own prayer. Try doing that at home.

Sadly, Debbie Friedman died on Sunday, Jan. 9 of complications from pneumonia. Over the years, I have been blessed to learn with her, sing with her, and hear her music in both concerts and CDs. She was a gift. I was amazed by the thousands of people that came together in prayer for Debbie's healing during her brief illness. We all sang her *Mishaberach*. All of us had hoped that our prayers, our songs would help Debbie's health improve. It wasn't to be so. In the end, it is my hope that all of us coming together helped her find the peace to let go and trust that her work would continue. I will never know, but I loved Debbie and I loved her music, so I will try

to find peace within the reality that thousands of people came together to pray for her .

In part, I am the Jewish educator I am today because of Debbie and others like her. There is so much that I want to share as an educator. I also believe that if you try new Jewish experiences you will find even more comfort within your Jewish practice. Consider allowing yourselves to bring a prayer into your home on a regular basis; allow that prayer to touch you deeply and bring the song into your heart. If you need help, ask. I am sure both the Rabbi and I can help you find a prayer that will touch you.

You can pray anywhere. Try praying when you are alone; try praying with your family. Add a prayer or a poem for those you love when you light the Shabbat candles. Consider bringing your children to not only the Family and Friends Shabbat Service on the second Friday of each month, but any other Friday night service. I have prayed in many different synagogues throughout my lifetime; Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer illuminates our community as he integrates prayer and song into our community.

Debbie Friedman gave American Jews wings to fly within our liturgy. On a personal note, as well as within the broader Jewish world, she gave us her love, her music, and her wisdom. All of this will live on. May her memory be a blessing for good.

From the Rabbi

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 hospitals 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

Getting to Know Our New Prayer Book

BJC recently purchased new prayer books. There will be two sessions to help you become familiar with them. The first session will be held at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 4, prior to the All Music Shabbat service. The second will be held on Saturday, Feb. 5 at 9:30 a.m. before morning Shabbat services.

Family and Friends Shabbat Dinner and Service

Join us on Friday, Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m. for our Family and Friends Shabbat Dinner and Service. BJC will provide main dish and vegetarian options and you provide the rest (dairy free):

- Last Names A-K bring fruit or dessert, serving 8-10
- Last Names L-Z bring salad or side, serving 8-10

Cost: \$7 Adults; \$5 children 12 and under
After Feb. 7, 2011—Cost: \$8 Adults;
\$6 children 12 and under

Please RSVP to Elizabeth Kirkpatrick at emk010@gmail.com by Feb. 7, 2011 and mail a check to BJC or drop one off in an envelope in Chava's office.

You can't cook at home for less and this is sure to be easier and much more fun!

BJC Book Club: *Cleopatra, A Life*

Please join us on Feb. 23 to discuss *Cleopatra, A Life* by Stacy Schiff. The book brings to vivid life a very

different Cleopatra from the one depicted to us by playwrights and movie directors. Instead of a wanton seductress relying solely upon her looks, Cleopatra was one of the most authoritative rulers in the history of humanity, inheriting at the age of 18 one of the greatest king-

doms ever known, during a time in history when



women had about the same social stature as farm animals.

A reviewer commented that the descriptions of the ancient world in which Cleopatra lived were so vivid that you would think the author was Cleopatra's contemporary, and not her 21st century biographer.

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

BJC Purim Spiel 2011! Mark Your Calendar

We are pleased to announce this year's hilariously entertaining spiel "Rock Around the Megillah" on Saturday, March 19.

This musical romp through the 50s and 60s will feature memorable and clever tunes such as "Esther, Mine Esther" (to the tune of Earth Angel), "Not Us Jews" (to the tune of Blue Suede Shoes), "The Great Jew Hater" (to the tune of The Great Pretender) and "I'm a Jew Babe" (to the tune of I've Got You Babe). And there's more!

Want to be a part of the fun? Worried that it is a big time commitment? Worry no more! BJC spiels are famous for minimal rehearsals (like, three, maybe four if we need it), memorization-free (clutch that script!), creative (we have no splashy budget) and bonding times.

So, no pressure. Just let Joan Wolf (JoanWolfJoanWolf@aol.com) know if you're in. We realize that you may have conflicts with the rehearsal schedule once it is solidified, but we'll manage. We look forward to hearing from you, and celebrating the holiday that encourages parodies!

February 2011 Calendar

Day	Date	Time	Event	Location
Wednesday	Feb. 2	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious school Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Friday	Feb. 4	7:00 p.m. 8:00 p.m.	Getting to Know Our New Prayer Book N'tivim L'Shabbat Music Service	Covenant Hall Covenant Hall
Saturday	Feb. 5	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 9:30 a.m. 10:30 am	Adult Hebrew Religious School Sandwich Making for Martha's Table Getting to Know Our New Prayer Book Shabbat Worship	Lounge Classrooms Memorial Hall Covenant Hall Covenant Hall
Wednesday	Feb. 9	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Thursday	Feb. 10	7:30 p.m.	BJC Board of Directors Meeting	Lounge
Friday	Feb. 11	6:30 p.m. 7:30 p.m.	Family and Friends Shabbat Shabbat Dinner	Covenant Hall Memorial Hall
Saturday	Feb. 12	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 10:30 a.m. 4:30 p.m.	Adult Hebrew Ed Stern's Adult Ed Class Shabbat Worship Chant Circle	Lounge Library Covenant Hall Covenant Hall
Wednesday	Feb. 16	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Friday	Feb. 18	8:00 p.m.	Simcha B' Shabbat All Music Service	Covenant Hall
Saturday	Feb. 19	10:30 a.m.	No Adult Hebrew No Religious School Shabbat Worship	Covenant Hall
Wednesday	Feb. 23	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m. 8:00 p.m.	Religious School Kemach and Torah BJC Book Club- <i>Cleopatra, A Life</i>	Classrooms Library Library
Friday	Feb. 25	6:30 p.m. 8:00 p.m.	Tot Shabbat Shabbat Worship	Lounge Covenant Hall
Saturday	Feb. 26	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 10:30 a.m.	Adult Hebrew Religious School Shabbat Worship—Gleeson Bat Mitzvah	Lounge Classrooms Covenant Hall
Wednesday	Mar. 2	4:15 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Religious school Kemach and Torah	Classrooms Library
Friday	Mar. 4	8:00 p.m.	N'tivim L'Shabbat Music Service	Covenant Hall
Saturday	Mar. 5	8:45 a.m. 9:00 a.m. 10:30 a.m.	Adult Hebrew Religious School Shabbat Worship—Schechter Bar Mitzvah	Lounge Classrooms Covenant Hall

For the latest updates and weekly E-news, please refer to the BJC website.

Yahrzeits

Dan Aronson, Brother of Joel Aronson
Harold Coplan, Uncle of Lois Rose
Samuel Druckman, Grandfather of Linda Blumberg
and Mark Blumberg
Anna Dubrow, Grandmother of Laurie Dubrow
Morris Dubrow, Grandfather of Laurie Dubrow
Maurice Feldman, Father of Betty Kline
Harry Goldberg, Father of Madeline Killefer
Beatrice L. Haber, Mother of Miles Haber
Leon Jacobson, Father of Annie Cifarelli
Ida Kline, Mother of Norman Kline
John Krettmeyer, Father of Nancy Glassman
Theodore Landsman, Father of Nancy Medlin
Sam Leopold, Father of Nancy Regan Sachs
Marchia Olney, Mother of Phyliss Hoffman
Shirley K. Ratner, Mother of Gary Ratner
Sarah Roger, Grandmother of Robert Poogach
Ernest Joseph Schmalz, Father of Lorraine McMillen
Estelle Schneider, Mother of Cindy Bogorad
Shirley Selditch, Mother of Renee Asher
Sylvia Simon, Mother of Martin Simon
Shirley Tahler, Grandmother of Rori Kochman
Judith Taylor, Mother of Lyne Taylor-Genser
Goldjean Turow, Mother of Stephen Turow
Harry Walders, Father of Larry Walders
Jerold Zisman, Father of Marsha Cholok

Thank you

Joel and Dee Aronson for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in memory of Mae Weiss.
Bill and Rochelle Banta for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.
Hartman and Tara Blanchard for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in honor of their daughter Olivia's Bat Mitzvah.
Bruce and Wynne Busman for their generous donation to the Cuba Fund in honor of the Yahrzeit of Wynne's father, Irving Cassell.
Warren and Anita Farb for their generous donation to the Cuba Fund.
Eric and Patricia Friedman for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in honor of their daughter Ali's Bat Mitzvah.
Allen Grunes and Diane Szczepanik for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.

יארצייט

Bruce and Michele Herzfeld for their generous donation in memory of David Weiss' mother, Mae Weiss.
Russ Hogle and Harri Kramer for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in memory of Mae Weiss.

Steve and Connie Jacobson for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund in honor of their son, Sam's Bar Mitzvah.

Louise Koffsky for her generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund as a thank you for all the Rabbi's help in Harold's final days and his funeral.

Jim and Liz Korelitz for their generous donation to purchase new book carts for the new prayer books.

Mitch and Julie Kraus for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.

Lorraine Levin for her generous donation in honor of the baby naming of her granddaughter.

Bernard Sharfman and Susan David for their generous donation in memory of David Weiss' mother, Mae Weiss.

Bernard Sharfman and Susan David for their generous donation in memory of Jon Eig's mother, Bette Eig.

Ed and Norma Stern for their generous donation in memory of Mae Weiss.

Antoine and Emily Van Agtmael for their generous donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.

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

Thank you to all who "rounded up" in their final synagogue support payment to help with the congregational operating expenses.

A very special thank you to all who donated so generously to the Cuba Fund to help with BJC's ongoing mission of help and support for the Jews in Cuba.

For their generous donations to Enhancing The Flame

Wynne and Bruce Busman
Warren and Anita Farb
Richard Fogel
Nancy Glassman
Stacey Rose-Blass
Ruth Rosenberg
Ed and Norma Stern
Lorrie Van Akkeren

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The deadline for submitting articles for the Mar. newsletter is Feb. 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 Mar. newsletter, mail it to the BJC office with your check made payable to BJC.
Deadline: Feb. 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.