

השוֹפָר haShofar

of DeKalb and Sycamore

Congregation Beth Shalom

820 Russell Road

DeKalb, IL 60115



CALENDAR

Thursday, Nov. 5	Book Group: <i>A Backpack, A Bear, Eight Crates of Vodka</i>	7:00 pm
Friday, Nov. 13	Shabbat Potluck (dairy)	6:30 pm
Wednesday, Nov. 11	<i>Deadline for receipt of Thanksgiving basket checks</i>	
Saturday, Nov. 21	Shabbat Service	10:00 am
Sunday, Nov. 22	Hanukkah Store open	10 am-noon
Sunday, Dec. 6	Hanukkah Party / Potluck (dairy) <i>First Night of Hanukkah</i>	5:00 pm
Friday, Dec. 11	Shabbat Service	7:30 pm
Sunday, Dec. 20	<i>The Italian Ghetto</i> video & dinner	5:30 pm
Thursday, Jan. 7	Book Group: <i>The Rabbi's Cat</i>	7:00 pm
Friday, Jan. 8	Shabbat Service	7:30 pm

November-December-January 2015/6 Cheshvan-Kislev-Tevet 5776

haShofar: Carol Zar, editor

FROM THE PRESIDENT: Nourishing the Community and Ourselves

Greetings to the members of Congregation Beth Shalom,

I hope that your High Holy Days and harvest holidays were pleasant and that you find yourselves in good health and spirits. I hope for this in spite of the grim news coming almost daily, both of violence in Israel and the intractable stalemate in our state government. I hope for this because the joys and challenges I wrote of in my last letter will need good people of health and spirit to meet them. And I hope for this because, despite our difficulties, we still need to look beyond ourselves to the needs of our congregational community and the greater community around us.

As our first step in caring for that greater community, we will again be accepting donations of both money and time to assemble food baskets for the Salvation Army to distribute at Thanksgiving. Our congregation has a proud tradition of contributing more than any other Dekalb/Sycamore institution to this drive and I hope you are willing and able to continue again this year. Adam Sinason has agreed to organize and lead these efforts for the congregation again this year, and I would like to express our gratitude for his efforts.

In caring for the greater community we must not forsake the care of our own community nor refrain from nourishment of our intellectual capacities and spiritual longings. For those inclined to make a charitable gift, there is the Community Fund, which we set up to provide emergency aid for members of our congregation. To nourish our minds, there will be regular meetings of our Book Club, led by the Rabbi and featuring the works *The Rabbi's Cat* and *A Marriage of Opposites*. We will also have an adult education event featuring food, dessert, and a documentary on the Venetian Ghetto! Finally, to nourish our spirits we will have services to celebrate Shabbat as well as our Hannukah party and dinner to keep the cold weather at bay with warm latkes.

The news of the day is often grim, but no one of us need face these times alone. Come join us!

As always, feel free to contact me with questions or comments.

Shalom,

Rob Feldacker, 815-762-0204, rfeldacker1@gmail.com

FROM THE RABBI: What Does the World Need From Me

(Excerpted from Rabbi Gordon's Kol Nidre sermon)

Welcome to 5776, and soon to be 2016. What does it mean to be Jewish in 5776? Serenity is not one of the pillars of Judaism. As Rabbi David Wolpe explains it, "If traditions can be divided into those that preach acceptance and those that preach unease, surely Judaism stands firmly in the second camp. The sense of the unfinished, the itch to improve, prevails in Judaism and in Jews." In Judaism such serenity as we are granted comes from the joy of making something better, not accepting something that is less.

The opportunity to make a difference in the world is our mission as members of the Jewish people. I use the term Jewish people in its most inclusive sense to include those who find Jewish ways and teachings meaningful and significant, in addition to more parochial definitions of who is "officially" Jewish and not.

On Rosh Hashana we are meant to look back at the past year to see how we've strayed from our path, so that we can return to it, and inasmuch as our path includes refraining from complacency, then we cannot turn away from the suffering and brokenness of our world. Rather, it is appropriate to feel upset and angry, and to feel inspired to act.

And part of the process of looking back then is to revisit our strengths and our talents, our gifts, so to speak, and to assess: Have we put our gifts to good use over the past year? Have you seriously thought about your strengths and talents recently? Have you thought about whether you spend your time putting those strengths to their best advantage?

Education Professor Richard Light describes exercises designed to help college freshmen identify their goals and reflect about various aspects of their personal lives, and then to connect what they discover to what they actually do at college.

In the first exercise, students are asked to make a list of how they want to spend their time at college. What matters to them? This might be going to class, studying, spending time with close friends, perhaps volunteering in the off-campus community or reading books not on any course's required reading list. Then students make a list of how they actually spent their time, on average, each day over the past week and match the two lists. Finally, they pose the question: How well do your commitments actually match your goals? A few students find a strong overlap between the lists. The majority are stunned and dismayed to discover they are spending much of their precious time on activities they don't value highly. The challenge, he writes, is how to align your time commitments to reflect your personal convictions.

That's my question. How do your commitments actually match your goals? How can you align your commitments to reflect your personal convictions? Can you make a mental list right now about what matters to you? And if you make a list of how you actually spent your time this past week, how do those activities align with what matters to you?

The exercise reminded me of how difficult it is to keep in touch with our personal strengths and talents, and what our goals are, as we go about our daily business. All the while we may be nursing that unease and itch to improve, but it's difficult to face the brokenness around and among us until we identify how we can be useful and make a difference.

Looking at the state of the world at the turn of the year, we see it tragically dominated by *sinat chinam*, causeless hatred – the harm human beings do to other human beings they do not even know. This includes the continued wanton use of semi-automatic weapons to kill and maim randomly and in quantity, the displacement of more people through war and famine worldwide than ever before in the history of the world, the increased awareness of how black lives don't matter in this country, an increase in anti-Semitism across college campuses in this country, and across Europe, the spread of violence by such groups as the Islamic State, and most recently knifings and other attacks by Arabs of Israeli Jews going about their daily business.

Other frightening areas of brokenness derive not from *sinat chinam*, but from a combination of greed and indifference: selfish unconcern for others. This past year saw the continued widening of the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the 1% and the other 99%, and the continued spread of slavery around the globe. This past year saw yet another increase in the temperature of the planet.

The only way that we can celebrate the beginning of a good, sweet year, is to make a difference, to act to ease the oppression of others. Which area or areas of *sinat chinam*, causeless hatred, will you direct your energies toward? Will you volunteer to sponsor a Syrian family seeking refuge? Will you urge our government to accept more refugees, lots more refugees? Will you write letters to editors of college papers in response to anti-Semitism? Will you work in a coalition with Muslims and Christians to promote tolerance and understanding? Will you donate to organizations rescuing people from slavery? Will you read *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander or *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates to begin to understand the daily fear and humiliation of being African-American in this country? Will you educate and lobby to outlaw semi-automatic weapons, those guns whose only purpose is to kill human beings? Will you speak up when others claim we don't need to alter our energy use in response to climate change?

What are you going to do to make this a good, sweet year? How are we going to do it together? On Rosh Hashanah we recited *Unetaneh tokef*, in which we list all the ways people will potentially suffer in the year to come, and we then stated that repentance, prayer and deeds of kindness could alleviate the severity of the decree.

Repentance, turning to do good in the world; prayer, praying that we can stay the distance to do our part; and deeds of kindness—our deeds of kindness for those who are displaced, enslaved, disturbed, taken advantage of, discriminated against, torn by *sinat chinam*, causeless hatred—all these deeds that we will do, will alleviate the severity of the decree, for us and for those to whom we reach out. Then, and only then, will it be a good, sweet year. May it be our will.

THANKSGIVING BASKETS – A CBS TRADITION

As we have for many years, Congregation Beth Shalom will put together Thanksgiving baskets for needy local families.

Adam Sinason, who has so efficiently coordinated this project for several years, has again volunteered to be in charge. We collect money. Adam purchases food in bulk. We fill the food baskets. Then we deliver the baskets to the Salvation Army, which collects names of families in need and distributes the baskets throughout the area.



The baskets are designed to provide Thanksgiving dinner. The Salvation Army provides us with a list so that all baskets provide the same food. Once again, last year, **our members contributed enough money to fill a record number of baskets** more than any other religious organization, most of which have much larger memberships.

So, this year, if you will again send a check, Adam again will make trips to the supermarkets and get the biggest bang for your buck. Checks should be made payable to Congregation Beth Shalom, marked for "Thanksgiving Baskets," and sent to Adam Sinason, 1530 Crayton Circle W, DeKalb, IL 60115. **Money must be received by Wednesday, November 11.**

You can also volunteer to help fill the baskets; it takes less than an hour. This year assembly will take place on November 14 at 9:00 am at the Sinason's, 1530 Crayton Circle W.

HANUKKAH SHOP OPEN JUST ONE DAY



Hanukkah begins on the evening of Sunday, December 6. In anticipation, our gift shop will be open for one day only, on Sunday, November 22. The shop will be open during Religious School, from 10 a.m. to noon. Stop by for all your Hanukkah needs, including candles, menorahs, dreidels, gelt, wrapping paper, and small toys. A supply of general Judaic items is also available, as well as Koleynu CDs.

CELEBRATE HANUKKAH, LATKES & MORE

So what is Hanukkah without a latke dinner with singing at shul? This year our dinner will be Sunday, December 6, at 5:00 pm. We'll provide the latkes, sour cream, and apple sauce.

Please bring a dairy salad, fish, side dish, or dessert to complement the latkes. Also please bring an unwrapped toy for the Children's Learning Center (ages 6 weeks to 12 years) which serves a large number of lower-income families some of whom do not receive help from any of the other local agencies. We have been contributing gifts for many years and they are very appreciative of our contributions.

Call (815-758-4827) or email (merylkgd@gmail.com) if you can help prepare the meal.

AN EVENING IN VENICE

How were Jews an important part of the history of Venice?

Why is medicine a popular profession among Jews?

Why were the Italian ghettos not all bad for Jews?

Could Jews really attend Italian universities in the 17th century?

You'll get the answers to these and many other questions if you come to our December 20 dinner with a professor. In this case, the professor is David Ruderman of the University of Pennsylvania, where he holds a named chair in modern Jewish history and is the director of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. Unfortunately, he won't appear in person but on a DVD that is fascinating.

On a cold December evening, he'll tell us about Venice in the 16th and 17th centuries as he examines the lives of several fascinating people who lived there, including the composer who introduced choral music to the synagogue and a Jewish doctor. This period, Ruderman says, restructured Jewish cultural life and ushered in a new era of Jewish-Christian relations.

Watch your email for details about dinner and reservations. Friends and teen-agers are welcome.

--Elizabeth Bass, adult ed chair

BOOK GROUP: A Graphic Novel (*no not that kind*)

The Rabbi's Cat, a graphic novel by Joann Sfar, is our January book club selection. It is a wonderful work of humor and a depiction of Jewish life in North Africa and Paris in the 1930s. It's also a great introduction to graphic novels. If you have never read this book, I suggest reading it before Hanukah...you may be buying lots of copies for gifts for all sorts of people! The book would be enjoyed by men and women, teens and adults. All are welcome when we discuss the book with Rabbi Gordon on Thursday, January 7, at 7 p.m.

Elizabeth Bass, adult ed. chair

From Amazon: The preeminent work by one of France's most celebrated young comics artists, *The Rabbi's Cat* tells the wholly unique story of a rabbi, his daughter, and their talking cat—a philosopher brimming with scathing humor and surprising tenderness.

In Algeria in the 1930s, a cat belonging to a widowed rabbi and his beautiful daughter, Zlabya, eats the family parrot and gains the ability to speak. To his master's consternation, the cat immediately begins to tell lies (the first being that he didn't eat the parrot). The rabbi vows to educate him in the ways of the Torah, while the cat insists on studying the kabbalah and having a bar mitzvah. They consult the rabbi's rabbi, who maintains that a cat can't be Jewish—but the cat, as always, knows better.

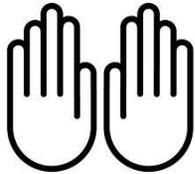
Zlabya falls in love with a dashing young rabbi from Paris, and soon master and cat, having overcome their shared self-pity and jealousy, are accompanying the newlyweds to France to meet Zlabya's cosmopolitan in-laws. Full of drama and adventure, their trip invites countless opportunities for the rabbi and his cat to grapple with all the important—and trivial—details of life.

Rich with the colors, textures, and flavors of Algeria's Jewish community, *The Rabbi's Cat* brings a lost world vibrantly to life—a time and place where Jews and Arabs coexisted—and peoples it with endearing and thoroughly human characters, and one truly unforgettable cat. – Amazon blurb

Publishers Weekly review excerpts: ... a hilarious and wildly original graphic novel for adults... tries to convince his master to teach him the Torah, raising the question of whether the appropriate age for his bar mitzvah should be in human years or cat years. Of course, being a cat, he has plenty of impertinent opinions about Judaism. ..the story becomes a broader, more bittersweet comedy about the rabbi's family and the intersection of Jewish, Arab and French culture. The Algerian family's visit with their Parisian in-laws is the subject of the final and funniest section of the book.

SHABBAT SERVICES ADD WARMTH TO COLD DAYS

Mark your calendars and plan to join us for these Shabbat services:



Friday, November 13, at 6:30 pm, we will have a dairy potluck. If you haven't been to one of our Shabbat dinners, you are missing good food and fellowship. Come and join us.

Saturday, November 21, at 10 am, join us for a Shabbat morning service. No special reason, just a chance to daven together, read Torah and maybe even schmooze a bit.

Friday, December 11 and Friday January 8, at 7:30 pm. The service will be followed by an oneg with desserts and conversation.

HIGH HOLY DAYS THANKS

I've been writing these columns thanking all those who participated in and helped out with Congregation Beth Shalom's High Holy Days services for several years now. Somehow, even after several years, it doesn't get easier to do everything that needs to be done (even with a system in place), which means that my thanks are all the more heartfelt this year. As always, many people worked hard both in the public view and behind the scenes to ensure that our services went off smoothly.

Most evident were our rabbi and cantorial soloist. Both Michael Remson and Zach Weiss, respectively, returned this year, and by now they work together seamlessly, delivering messages through speech and song that make our services so meaningful. Also of note in the public view is our choir, Koleynu, whose contributions are a special part of our evening services. Led by Harvey Blau, the members of Koleynu rehearse for months leading up to the holidays. It simply wouldn't be the holidays without them, and their efforts are much appreciated.

During morning services, a key part of our worship revolves around the Torah. This year, the Torah was chanted by Roberta Maxfield on Rosh Hashanah and Barbara Kaufmann on Yom Kippur. The Haftarah was read by Rachel Hecht on Rosh Hashanah (stepping in when our regular chanter was away) and by Jenny Gelman on Yom Kippur. And of course, on Rosh Hashanah and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, we have Jerry Zar to thank once again for blowing the shofar.

Other people to thank are Jeff Hecht, who served as our gabbai, and James Cohen, who led the Yizkor service. Thanks as well to all of the people who had an Aliyah, carried the Torah, and lifted and wrapped the Torah. And a special nod goes to Barbara Kaufmann, who baked the delicious cake and cookies we enjoyed at our Erev Rosh Hashanah oneg and at the end of Yom Kippur.

Not everyone is aware of all that goes on behind the scenes, without which our services without doubt could not take place. This year, with Avi Bass out of the country, much of the logistical work dealing with NIU fell to our president, Rob Feldacker, who certainly did a yeoman's job. Rob made arrangements with the Holmes Student Center staff (and his neighbor, who lent a truck) so that everything could be moved from the synagogue to NIU, where services are held. (Everything, for those who don't know, includes the "portable" Ark, the Torahs, heavy boxes of prayer books, stools, linens, and decorative foliage.) This year, the moving crew and set-up crew on various days—under Rob's direction—consisted of James Cohen, Missy Garman, David Gorman, and Karen Sinason. (If I've left anyone out, my apologies.) Many people also helped pack everything up at the end of services, notably Avi Bass, Ilya Krishtal, Brian Maxfield, and Stephen Coughenour. We also appreciate the assistance of the Holmes Student Center custodians and staff.

So todah rabbah to everyone. You are much valued.

Jackie Gorman, Ritual Chair

SOCIAL ACTION

Two DeKalb social service agencies, Hope Haven Homeless Shelter and the Salvation Army Food Pantry provide valuable and necessary help for local families in need. To accomplish this, they rely on volunteers from the community largely provided by local places of worship. Beth Shalom has been actively supporting both for many years and our volunteers benefit from the satisfaction of participating in this important work.

Hope Haven volunteers provide a complete evening meal for as many as 50 people (including children) on the first Wednesday of every month, shopping for and delivering the meal to the shelter. Many thanks to recent volunteers Robin Schoenburg, Lizz Brookshire, Missy Garman, Liz and Harvey Blau, and Carol and Jerry Zar.

Salvation Army Food Pantry volunteers work from 9:00-12:00 on the third Thursday of the month, helping shoppers throughout the pantry aisles. Thanks to recent volunteers Karen Sinason, Carol Zar, Linda Schwarz, Roberta and Brian Maxfield, and Barbara Kaufmann.

There are openings for volunteers at the food pantry in February, May, June, July and August. Just let me know when you would like to help!

Liz Blau, coordinator, liz@lizblau.com

CHATTER

This time all I've got are some address changes, both snail and email. Please make these changes in your directories. Now if you want some interesting items you'll have to start sending them to me! Engagements, births, honors, all are appropriate. If I don't know about it, I can't print it. Send info to me at czar@niu.edu.

Carolyn Haber
517 Roberts Lane
DeKalb IL 60115

Shulamit Ran & Abraham Lotan
400 E. Randolph #2803
Chicago, IL 60601

Barbara Kaufmann: retired60@outlook.com

Don't stop reading! There is an invitation from the McHenry County Jewish Congregation (Rabbi Maralee's other congregation) on the next page.

**Please join
McHenry County Jewish Congregation
As we welcome
Rabbi Barbara Aiello
As our Scholar-in-Residence**



Saturday, Nov. 14-Sunday, Nov. 15

Rabbi Barbara Aiello is the first and only woman rabbi in Italy. She is the founder of the B'nai Anusim movement in southern Italy. B'nai Anusim is an initiative to help the hidden Jews of Calabria and Sicily, whose ancestors were forced into Christian conversion 500 years ago, return to their Jewish heritage. Rabbi Aiello is founding director of the Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria, where once over half the population was Jewish, and is the rabbi of the first active synagogue in the area since the Inquisition. Rabbi Barbara has received numerous awards and is an internationally recognized speaker.

For more information, go to RabbiBarbara.com.

Rabbi Barbara will be the featured speaker at two events:

Saturday, Nov. 14 @ 7 pm: "The Hidden Jews of Sicily & Calabria"

MCJC, 8617 Ridgefield Road, Crystal Lake

Sunday, Nov. 15 @ 1 pm: "How Italians Saved Jews during World War II"

Meadow View Lodge, 12980 Meadow View Court, Sun City/Huntley

(In conjunction with the Shalom Group of Sun City/Huntley)

**The talks are free and open to the public; however, please RSVP by 11/8 to
MCJC, mcjcoffice@yahoo.com or call 815/455-1810.**