



**WHEN AT HABONIM, DON'T DO LIKE THE ROMANS...**

by Rabbi Joshua Katzan

This summer, I had the pleasure of traveling to Italy for a two week vacation, and I must say it was extraordinary. I say that not only because it was a delight to the senses with all of its fresh foods, wines, art, history, and overall beauty, but because I learned a lot about the meaning of community, specifically the *Habonim community*.

I was there over two *Shabbatot*, first in Rome and then Florence the following week. Since I arrived early on Friday, I was able to walk around and have lunch in the area of the old Jewish Ghetto. What remains there is a beautiful synagogue, a community center, and several kosher restaurants. I attempted to make some eye contact with the Jewish Italians who were congregating there, hoping to strike up a conversation and learn a little about the modern Jewish community. As it turned out, I wasn't successful, so I ate my lunch and left to explore what I could before preparing for Shabbat services.

I returned to the synagogue that evening and, following the requisite search by Israeli security, I was awe struck by the absolutely gorgeous synagogue of Rome. It was large and magnificent. There may have been 75 men and women, yet it felt nearly empty. I did feel a slight chill. I realized that, similar to my experience during lunch, no one bothered to greet me, even as I made efforts to opening myself up as a visitor. At the end of the service, I was informed about the starting time for the following day, given a mechanical "Shabbat Shalom," and that was it. I hovered for a while outside hoping to engage, or be engaged, by someone in the community... but it never happened. The same thing happened on Shabbat morning when I went to a separate service nearby on the Isola Tiberina. I was asked if I was a Cohen for the sake of the Torah service, and that was the extent of how I was acknowledged. Even my brief conversation with the Rabbi, where I thanked him for his words that day, was not followed up with any conversation about where I was from, if I was visiting, etc. I was left alone, feeling as if I could have not been there and it would have been entirely unnoticed.

In Florence, it was similar, but I felt saved by Chabad. The Florentines were not terribly friendly either, and were certainly overrun by tourists (there was a USY group of about 45 teenagers, more than twice the number of Italian Jews in the room!). But Chabad has a center there, and they were very proactive in connecting with people, and had us all over (a total

of almost 100 people) for Shabbat meals, both Friday night and Saturday. Rabbi Borenstein of Chabad works tirelessly to provide opportunities for Jews to connect and keep Shabbat together. They were wonderfully welcoming, and I highly recommend to anyone going to Florence to spend Shabbat with them.

Certainly, there is no question that the Jewish communities of Rome and Florence must be suffering from Tourist Fatigue Syndrome, as many multiples of their indigenous numbers of Jews flood in and out throughout the summer months. It stands to reason that they could be worn out.

However, what was instructive to me is how important it is to maintain a welcoming environment. As I celebrated Shabbat in Italy, my mind drifted back home to Habonim. Habonim impresses me, as it did from the start, as being a very welcoming environment, and I hear about it on a regular basis. We can be proud of the efforts of our members who approach new faces and welcome them with a smile and a conversation. We're doing something right and, after having had a taste of what it's like to go without it, it is all the more evident to me how important it is to, as the sages teach us, "Greet all people with a cheerful countenance." (Avot 1:15)

Although the ways in which attributes of hospitality are expressed can be entirely cultural, it also happens to be a *mitzvah* that the Torah tries to instill in us. We learn from a story about Abraham the importance of hospitality. In Gen. 18, we learn that he welcomed in the three guests who were passing by his tent with graciousness and brought them a feast. From this we learn the *mitzvah of Hachmasat Orchim*, the welcoming of guests.

We are to welcome guests into the places we call "home." Your apartment is your home, and so is Habonim, as we are a spiritual home for our community. To welcome people in means to say hello, share a few words, feed them, and give them an opportunity to rest or have shelter. I have witnessed our members do this with newcomers so much so, that I have happily had to *wait in line* to introduce myself to our visiting guests as the Rabbi of the congregation!

Another way to do this is to have people over to our Shabbat tables. If one does not regularly have the practice of a "Shabbat dinner," think about starting one, at least on occasion, and proactively invite people to your table. *continued on page 2*

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Congregation Habonim  
is a member of the  
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**Rabbi Katzan** *continued from page 1* The simple act of having someone over for dinner is a profound way of creating a sense of community. As well, being a guest in someone else's home is as important.

I have known many who make it a practice to cook extra food and set extra places at the table for the potential impromptu guest, and I have taken this tradition on myself. The more people come to services Friday evening (6:30-7:30pm year round), the more potential there is for both picking up some guests or being invited out. It's a beautiful next-step: the art of creating community. And it goes a very long way toward opening Habonim to our fellow Jews who are just beyond our doors. Besides, as technology seems to make it increasingly easy to be isolated from real human contact, it is good to exercise the social component of our nature as humans. It can bring comfort, and build bonds.

I once heard the definition of a "good community." It is one where people notice when you're not there. If you have not been to Habonim for a service in a while, know this: **We miss you**, and look forward to having you back soon! As you know, we run services Saturday morning from 9:30am to Noon, followed by a Kiddush lunch. We look forward to seeing you, catching up, and celebrating together one of the great treasures of the Upper West Side: the community of Congregation Habonim.

## QUEENS COMMUNITY

We hope you all had a healthy and enjoyable summer.

Under the selfless and capable leadership of our chairman Peter Mayer, we are looking forward to another season of Friday night services and Adult Education meetings. We are a "family" of old-timers, many going back to the founding of our congregation, still very much involved and thrilled with it's vitality and future growth. If any of our Manhattan members care to come and share our monthly services and Oneg, you may find it a rewarding experience.

— Ruth K. Heiman

## SISTERHOOD TO PUBLISH A NEW COOKBOOK

In celebration of Habonim's 70th Anniversary, Sisterhood has decided to publish a new cookbook. All during the coming year, we will be gathering recipes, testing them and designing our new cookbook. This is a big project and we need help with it. We are looking for volunteers who will collect recipes from congregants and friends of our community. We also need cooks who are willing to test the recipes that we have gathered. Along with the cooks, we could use tasters who will help us to decide which recipes to include in the new cookbook. We also need volunteers who will help us with the editorial aspects of the project, including designing the book covers, dividers, page layout, etc. We are planning a kickoff meeting on Thursday evening, September 17th at 7:30 pm at the home of Janet Schwartz, 160 West 66th Street, #40A – located between Broadway and Amsterdam. If you are interested in working with us on this project, please plan to come. Whether or not you can attend the meeting, please call one of us to let us know of your interest. We can be reached at:

Janet - 212.873.1086 or avischwa@aol.com

Mary - 212.362.9234 or maryhsanders@gmail.com

We look forward to working on the 70th Anniversary edition of the Habonim Sisterhood cookbook with you!

— Janet Schwartz and Mary Sanders  
Cookbook Co-Chairs

## MAZEL TOV

Deborah, John and Avery Meer on the birth of their  
daughter and sister, Lucy

As many of you know, I have just completed 25 years as cantor of our wonderful synagogue. I have truly enjoyed my time here, and am eager to begin the next quarter century! Reflecting on the many varied roles of my position, it strikes me that I have a favorite role and, ironically, it is one which could actually have the potential to “put me out of business!”

I am speaking, of course, about my work with many of you from thirteen year olds to senior adults – teaching you how to lead the congregation in prayer. They often say that the best gift we can give to someone we care about is something that we ourselves would want...and the opportunity to lead the congregation has truly been one of the best gifts of my life. But I love nothing more than to share, with as many of you as possible, the knowledge of how to lead our fellow congregants in prayer.

Of course, we have seen the traditional synagogue service evolve a great deal over the 20th century. During most of the early part of the last century, services were led by the hazzan (cantor), using a complicated musical system called *nusach* to identify the various services. Many in the congregation could identify these slight variations, which indicated exactly what service of Jewish calendar was being led. The congregation would listen to these melismatic chants and respond, usually with an “Amen,” or join in on short melodies that would be interspersed within the prayer. A prayer like the Prayer for Peace, the *Hashkiveinu*, is about five lines long, but it could take the cantor a full ten minutes to intone! Even earlier, at the other extreme, the 19th century brought great choral services to the synagogue which were based on a classical tradition that was also used by the church. In these cases, the congregation could “sit back and listen” – almost as audience members -- and be simply moved by the beautiful music. An example of this is our own Habonim High Holiday service with the choir and organ, brought to us directly from Germany at the time of the founding of our congregation in 1939. For many of our long-time members, this music still evokes childhood and a home that was stable, as well as the great loss of that home and often of family members as well.

In the last thirty years, with the advent of the Israeli Hassidic Song Festivals and the influence of folk music, a more participatory style became a part of the contemporary prayer service.

While in the past the rabbi and the cantor had distinct and rather separate roles from the congregation, there is now more participation -- with everyone singing together. This has also created opportunities for some members to take on new rituals during the service that were once reserved for the clergy. Our rabbis and I have certainly encouraged this at Habonim, and it has led to a congregation which participates in a very meaningful way during our services, by chanting Torah or Haftarah, and even by leading Shiva minyans for fellow congregants in their homes.

Rabbi Larry Hoffman, my liturgy teacher, says that if we approach services as if we are boarding an airplane, where the rabbi and cantor are the pilot and navigator and all we have to do is sit back and enjoy the ride, we have abandoned our responsibility as participants. In this model, we don't matter — the plane will take off and land whether or not we are paying attention, and regardless of the number and individual identities of the “passengers.”

But what if we understood our roles differently? Imagine how it would feel if each person came into worship prepared to actively pray, to reach inside and find his/her heart's urgent desire to commune with God, to pray for help in dealing with a personal problem, or to soak up the sense of solidarity that comes from being a part of the *kahal* (community)?

In the coming year, I hope that many of you will sign up for adult Hebrew lessons, and learn to chant Torah and Haftarah. Our challenge as clergy is to find ways that engage each person sitting in the congregation to find personal meaning in the experience of prayer and community. May this year be one of exploration and growth for each of us, each in our own way.

For me, personally, I hope this will be a year of coming together in Jewish prayer. I hope that our services will be a time to be inspired and challenged, to be joyful and still. I pray that they will offer us a quiet time to look deep within and renew ourselves, and to think beyond ourselves as we renew our resolve to make a difference in the world. May our services at Habonim be filled with music that moves us, and words that matter. work for justice and peace in the world.

My family and I wish you a *Shanah Tovah* and a fulfilling new year. — Cantor Bruce, Joanie, Rebecca (21) and Talia (16)

## SISTERHOOD IS JOINING THE FIGHT AGAINST BREAST CANCER

On Sunday, September 13, 2009, Sisterhood members will take part in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, joining thousands of women and men in New York City's Central Park for a monumental breast cancer fundraising and awareness event. The event is a 5K run/walk, so you need not be a world-class athlete to participate! We will be joining with members of Sharsheret, the national organization of cancer survivors dedicated to addressing the unique concerns of young Jewish women facing breast cancer. Team Sharsheret will meet at 8:30 AM on the northeast corner of 74th Street and

Central Park West for a Team Sharsheret photo. The Race will begin at 9:00 AM.

To join us, register for Team Sharsheret by visiting [www.komennyc.org](http://www.komennyc.org), click on “Race for the Cure,” click on “Join a Race Team” and type Sharsheret, then click on “Search for a Team”. When the search results are displayed, select team Sharsheret (with team captain Ellen Kleinhaus) and click on “JOIN”.

Women's League for Conservative Judaism, our umbrella organization, is sponsoring Sharsheret's participation in races and walks across the country. As a supporter, Women's League's name and

logo will be included on the t-shirts worn by Sharsheret walkers in races and walks from this September through August of next year.

Anyone who cannot actually join us in the park can still fight breast cancer by sponsoring one of our Habonim participants. To do this, visit [www.komennyc.org](http://www.komennyc.org) click on “Race for the Cure,” click on “Sponsor a Participant”, then search for team Sharsheret and select one of our Habonim participants.

Please contact Amy Kargauer at 212.787.1516 or [karwalkers@gmail.com](mailto:karwalkers@gmail.com) with any questions.

## GOIN' TO THE CHAPEL AND WE'RE

### GONNA GET MARRIED

(FEEL FREE TO SING)

Goin' to the chapel and we're  
Gonna get married  
Goin' to the chapel and we're  
Gonna get married  
Gee, I really love you and we're  
Gonna get married  
Goin' to the chapel of love

Don't worry this piece is not going to describe all of the details of my upcoming wedding. But, I am going to be talking about LOVE. This popular song by the Dixie Cups, from the 1950's illustrates the season we are about to enter – the month of ELUL (begins August 21st-September 18th – Rosh Hashanah eve), the month of preparation leading us to the High Holidays.

Jewish tradition points to the name of the month ELUL, (spelled *aleph, lamed, vav, lamed*) an acronym for the words in the verse from Song of Songs (6:3), *Ani le-dodi ve-dodi li*, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." Believing that the "beloved" refers to God, the Sages take this verse to describe the particularly loving and close relationship between God and Israel. ELUL is our time to reflect, strengthen and re-establish this closeness. ELUL is our time to fall in love with God, all over again.

What would our preparation for the High Holidays include if we accept the notion that we are in fact married to God? How might we direct our thoughts and our actions during the month of ELUL (and throughout the year) if we viewed God as our spouse, our partner? What would we do differently? What would we change?

Each of us was created in the image of God, with God-like abilities. Human being was given life, not through speech like every other creation, but through breath. God breathed into the nostrils of human being. Every breath we take in is a reminder of that first breath. Every inhalation includes God's breath. Every exhalation represents ALL of our ability. What will we decide to do with each of our God breaths? What will we say? What will we keep from saying?

While teshuvah, looking inward, reflecting should happen throughout the year, the Sages understood the reality of life (even back then people were busy), the month of ELUL was dedicated to stopping, reflecting and taking an account of our actions over the last year. What did we do well? When did we come up short? Where do we stand with each of our relationships? When did we judge? When did we forget to demonstrate compassion? How were we helpful? How did we demonstrate our care and our love? In what ways did we succeed?

The month of ELUL is about time, taking time, giving ourselves permission to take time. It is not intended to be a month of beating ourselves up or bashing ourselves into the ground. ELUL represents opportunity and hope for the year ahead. ELUL represents change and growth.

ELUL, *Ani le-dodi ve-dodi li*, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." ELUL is our chance to renew our vows, renew our commitment to our faith and to God. We know that this is possible because just as our loved ones accept us for who we are, so too does God.

HERE IS YOUR MISSION (should you choose to accept): designate 5 minutes EVERY DAY to sit quietly and think. 5 minutes to think about yourself. 5 minutes to ask and answer the difficult questions you didn't have time to consider enough during this past year. 5 minutes to renew your love for yourself and for God. 5 minutes a day is all it takes. It will make a difference on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and perhaps throughout the year.

*Mekor ha'Chayim*, Source of life, let us trust in your love for us and the strength of our relationship so that we may reflect honestly and thoughtfully. Let us be kind and compassionate to ourselves so real teshuvah can happen. Let us truly have faith in the possibility of change and growth.

See you at the wedding!

*Shanah tovah u'metuakah* – a sweet and happy new year to you and your family and friends.

*B'chavod* (with tremendous gratitude and respect),

— Rabbi LP

## SING! SHOUT! DANCE!

### ANOTHER YEAR IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!!

*Chadashot* (news) from the Anne Hahn Religious School – "The best PLACE for families to learn and grow."

*B'ruchim Habaiim!* Welcome Back! We hope that your summer was filled with fun, relaxation and a lot of joy. It is hard to believe that several months have passed since we said *l'hitraot* ("see you later") back in May.

We are very excited for this upcoming year and are looking forward to seeing everyone soon!

There are a lot of exciting and new features to the RS program beginning with the hiring of new staff. They are friendly, kind, creative and fun – just like the staff who are returning. We also have some new families joining our RS community. We know you will welcome them with warmth and friendship. We are particularly thrilled and proud to the launch of our new TZ'IRIM (TEEN) INITIATIVE!!! You will also notice new names/titles have been added to already existing programs. We have done this in order to provide continuity throughout the program and to better reflect who we are and what we do.

## YAD B'YAD, HAND IN HAND ...

That's what it means and that's what we do. YAD B'YAD, HAND IN HAND we'll spend time together exploring the richness of Judaism. Families will have multiple opportunities throughout the year to discover the beauty and joy of celebrating Jewish life together. YAD B'YAD, HAND IN HAND we'll sing, dance, pray and play as we carry out the traditions of our ancestors and even create some new ones of our own. You won't want to miss any of these exciting family programs. A calendar of events is/will be posted on the website. Activities include monthly Shabbat family service and dinner, monthly Shabbat morning services (these will be held off site at the Unitarian Church on 68th and CPW), Havdalah celebrations, picnics and play in Central Park, Sukkah decorating, Purim carnival, Tzedek Run, Israel Parade, fruit picking and so much more!!!!

Check out the website. Mark your calendars NOW!!! Go to: [www.habonim.net](http://www.habonim.net) to "Prayer and Religious Life," then click "Shabbat Services," and scroll down and click on "Youth and Family Services."

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**Yab B'Yad** *continued from page 4* We are going to kick off the year with a YAD B'YAD family picnic lunch in Sheep Meadow on September 13th from 11:00am-1:00pm. Bring a blanket and lunch along with your Frisbees, hula hoops, jump ropes, balls and gloves. We'll provide some snacks and bubbles!!! This is for families with children of ALL AGES.

**BRAND NEW – YAD B'YAD FAMILY HIGH HOLIDAY SERVICE – SECOND DAY OF ROSH HASHANAH – SEPTEMBER 20TH**

Please join us as we launch our new YAD B'YAD High Holiday FAMILY SERVICE. This is in lieu of youth services. There will be two services, one for families with children 6 and under and one for families with children 7 and up. YAD B'YAD, HAND IN HAND we will bring in the new year with sweetness and song. Information regarding times and location is listed on the website and on your HHD cards.

**YAD B'YAD, HAND IN HAND WE'LL EXPLORE AND ENJOY TOGETHER!!!**

### **DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDAR:**

**September 13th, 11:00am-1:00pm – YAD B'YAD – PICNIC IN CENTRAL PARK – BRING YOUR LUNCH AND YOUR HULA HOOPS, BALLS, GLOVES AND FRISBEES AND JOIN YOUR FRIEND FOR SOME FUN IN THE SUN!!!**

**September 13th, 5:30-7:30pm TZ'IRIM – KICK OFF BBQ (FOR TEENS – GRADES 8 AND UP) – At the home of Rabbi Josh Katzan. Join your friends to eat delicious food and share stories from your summer. Watch your emails for more information coming soon!**

#### **RS programming begins on:**

September 14th 4-6pm for Dalet – Vav (4th-6th)

September 14th 5:30-7:30pm for Zayin (7th)

September 15th 4-6pm for Gan – Bet (k-2nd)

September 16th 4-6pm for Gimmel – Hei (3rd-5th)

September 16th 6:30-8:30pm for Tz'irim (teens) (8th-12th) – please note: Tz'irim meets twice a month

Please note that Community tefillah will occur in the Sanctuary from 5:30-6:00pm each day RS meets. Family members and caregivers are welcome and encouraged to attend.

**A FULL CALENDAR OF EVENTS WAS MAILED AND IS ALSO ON OUR WEBSITE**

**WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU!**

**BRING YOUR ENERGY AND YOUR SMILES!**

— *Rabbi LP and Rebecca Elkus*

### **REBECCA ELKUS AWARDED DEGREE AT JTS COMMENCEMENT**

New York, NY, July 21, 2009—Rebecca Elkus, a member of Congregation Habonim, was awarded the degree of Master's in Jewish Education from the Davidson School at The Jewish Theological Seminary at commencement exercises held May 21 at JTS in New York City.

A total of 158 degrees were conferred on 146 graduates at JTS's 115th Commencement Exercises. The distinguished grad-

uates are the newest group of lay and professional leaders trained to serve nationwide as rabbis, academics, cantors, scholars, Jewish educators, and community leaders.

Ms. Ruth W. Messinger, president and CEO of American Jewish World Service (AJWS), delivered the commencement address, "Global Citizenship and Twenty-First Century Judaism," and was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

Of the 146 graduates who participated in this year's commencement, forty-eight received bachelor's degrees from Albert A. List College of Jewish Studies; thirty-three, including six students earning doctorates, received degrees from The Graduate School; thirty-six received degrees from the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education; including one EdD; ten cantors were invested by the H. L. Miller Cantorial School and College of Jewish Music; and thirty-one men and women were ordained by The Rabbinical School. Twelve students received two degrees from different JTS schools.

### **NURSERY SCHOOL NEWS**

It is hard to believe that the summer is coming to an end, and the beginning of school and Rosh Hashanah are almost upon us. We have spent the summer meeting, planning, purchasing terrific new equipment for the Social Hall, and restocking the classrooms. New teachers have been hired, and our wonderful returning teachers are preparing to come back. It gets very quiet around the building during the summer months, so we are happily anticipating the children's return.

In our continuing efforts to welcome new families to the Habonim community, we instituted a "Buddy" program this summer. All families new to our school were called by a current Nursery School parent during the month of July. This initiative was one of many PTA activities undertaken during the summer by Allison Epstein and Mindy Green, our 2009/2010 PTA Co-Chairs. Our hope is that, having received a call, new parents will feel that they know someone when school begins, and also will have a "seasoned" parent to turn to if they have a question before the start of school. Of course, they always are welcome to call or email me in the Nursery School office as well.

We are very excited to be embarking upon our thirteenth year as a school. To mark this important milestone, we are declaring this year our B'nai Mitzvah year, and are planning a special Shabbat celebration and Kiddush next spring. Michele Gold, former PTA Co-Chair and current Nursery School parent, has graciously agreed to spearhead this special event. We hope to involve current Nursery School parents and children, teachers, and Nursery School graduates and their parents. Details will most definitely follow as plans unfold. In addition to this once-in-a-lifetime occasion, each Nursery School class sponsors a Kiddush during the school year. These Shabbat mornings are wonderful occasions for families in all of the Nursery School classes to gather together.

I look forward to a wonderful year ahead, one in which our children grow and flourish as they learn about the world around them, make new friends, start to understand the meaning of their Jewish identity, and take their place as some of the youngest members of our Habonim community.

— *Cindy Grebow*

## ADULT EDUCATION: LEARN FOR ME'AH WITH ME'AH!

When I think of Synagogue education, my mind immediately takes me to the Religious School and of educating the young. But Congregation Habonim is striving to change this feeling, addressing the intellectual needs of people of all ages. This past year, Congregation Habonim proudly joined forces with B'nai Jeshurun and Shaare Zedek to enable our congregants and Jews throughout the Upper West Side to participate in The Me'ah Program.

Me'ah is Hebrew College's innovative adult Jewish learning experience. Through 100 hours of in-depth text study over two years, Me'ah (which means "one hundred" in Hebrew) deepens your understanding of and connection to Jewish history and the Jewish people. The course is led by University-level faculty who enrich your study of four central periods in Jewish history: Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval and Modern. Habonim graduates of the program include: Rachael Bickhardt, Judith Greenspan, Maryann King, Ruth Murphy, Karen Dine, Beth Lawrence, Elizabeth Bernhardt, Ellie Schaffer, and Norbert Fruehauf. The latter three shared with me the impact the course had upon them.

According to Elizabeth Bernhardt, "the Me'ah course is a scholarly overview of Jewish history, philosophy, and literature, from Biblical times to the present (it's the "Plato to NATO" of

Judaism, but it begins before Plato and ends with contemporary Israeli literature). I guess I'd hoped to arrive at some answers to the question of what it means to be Jewish - this didn't happen, but the nature of the mystery is greatly clarified."

When asked whether they would recommend this course to other Habonim Congregants, both Norbert Fruehauf and Ellie Schaffer enthusiastically replied yes. Mr. Fruehauf related to me that "the university faculty, the many readings and the astute comments and questions of my fellow classmates made this two year intensive study program most rewarding and a great learning experience." Ellie Schaffer felt that Me'ah provided "a historical context in which to further study Jewish thinkers, events, and texts." As she explains, "For the last two years, over four semesters, I spent Monday nights with 20 other students from three different upper West Side synagogues as we worked our way through the Biblical period up through modern Judaism. It was a fascinating journey."

To learn more about Me'ah or to attend a complimentary evening featuring a mini-class taught by a Me'ah Faculty member, please contact Sharri Posen 212-865-0600 x205 or [sposen@anschechesed.org](mailto:sposen@anschechesed.org), or visit Me'ah's website: <http://hebrewcollege.edu/meah>.

— Glenna Lee

## SPOTLIGHT OF THE MONTH: SARA LISE RAFF

Sara Lise Raff, mother of Elias, Josie, and Oren, has been a member of Habonim for the past three years, but has attended services even longer. As a child, Sara grew up attending synagogues throughout Manhattan, but her family never joined a synagogue. It was important to her as an adult and parent that she become part of a Conservative synagogue, so that she would have the opportunity to build relationships with other people.

Building relationships seems to be Sara's strong suit. After being a classroom teacher, Sara went into education consulting, so that she could work with teachers to enhance their classroom learning. One interesting role she's taken on is working for Pierre Dulaine of Dancing Classrooms (featured in the film *Mad, Hot Ballroom*), to train his staff in working with children. While pregnant with her second child, Sara was asked by Dulaine to work with him. It was a great job and Sara was excited to take it. However, the job was due to begin on October 22 and she was due with her daughter, Josie on October 12! Sara called her mom and told her the dilemma, her mother immediately responded: Sara, it's a great opportunity, we'll make it work, take the job!

Sara has always found a way of balancing three children with her career. For her new project, Sara has switched from classroom learning to web-based learning: [asktheeducator.blogspot.com](http://asktheeducator.blogspot.com). This website enables parents to ask questions about their children's developmental and educational growth and expect honest and reasonable answers from a person with a strong background in parenting and education.

With this, we are delighted to have Sara Lise Raff as one of our new writers for our feature, Teach Your Children Well.

Have a question for Sara? Want some information about children in NYC? Visit her website: <http://www.asktheeducator.blogspot.com>

## TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

### ROSH HASHANAH: JUST IN TIME FOR THE SCHOOL BELL

As a child attending public school, I remember my third grade teacher dismissing us right before the winter break and saying "I will see you all in the New Year." I was perplexed. Was it the end of school? Was my class changing? Why was it a New Year when everything would be the same when I came back? I always felt the Secular New Year came at an odd time. It was cold and it just seemed like the wrong time to pull myself together and set new goals and routines when the rest of my life made it impossible to get out of the old ones. As a mother my feelings have not changed.

The Jewish New Year, that brings us to the beginning of the Torah and often coincides with the beginning of the school year represents vast changes, new challenges and a chance to do things better. As I say goodbye to the "lax" days of summer, September reveals so many new opportunities to improve the way I live my life. Trying harder to be more patient with my children, figuring out better schedules that leave my family and me less frazzled and doing a better job coming to synagogue on Shabbat, top my list this year. Rosh Hashanah is a holiday that forces us to reflect and gives us a chance to become the new, better person you want to be and it comes at an auspicious time when our secular lives allow for this to happen. For children, this is a wonderful time for them to also be encouraged to reflect and make changes in a formal and practical way.

There can be great power in simple conversations with your child about what they can make possible in this New Year. Rosh Hashanah is the perfect opportunity to help your child put a plan in place using their school year and their Jewish New Year as the starting point. Can they be more social? Whine less? Use appropriate language to stand up for themselves? *continued on page 7*

**TEACH** *continued from page 6* Be less afraid? A better student? Practice their Hebrew? Try a new activity? Volunteer? Be more active in our synagogue? Focusing on one or two goals is enough for young children and older children might be able to do a couple more. While conversations about these goals is great, the saying “if it isn’t written, it never happened” rings true in this case. Below are some ideas of how kids can write down a plan, keep it in motion and keep track of their success:

- Make a list of goals on poster paper and hang it on the wall. Cross off as goals are achieved.
- Create a table in MS Word, listing desired behaviors on the left and check off every time a desired behavior is displayed.
- Make a sticker chart and have your child put a sticker on every time they achieve a goal.
- Create a journal.
- Take pictures and create collages of achievements.
- Write a blog about (blogspot.com is free!) all the Mitzvahs they are doing.
- Talk, talk, talk about and encourage your kids to talk about their goals and wishes and how you can help them!
- Create family goals.

I found an interesting Rabbi’s sermon about how we should think about goal setting and willing things to happen. [http://www.kolel.org/pages/holidays/5768\\_RHS1.html](http://www.kolel.org/pages/holidays/5768_RHS1.html)

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, I wish for you, your children and your entire family a year filled with sweetness, joy and goals met with success! Shana Tova!

*Sara Lise Raff is a Habonim member and serves on the Religious School Committee. She currently leads workshops for educators and parents in NYC. You can catch her on her weekly blog <http://asktheeducator.blogspot.com>*

## UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM: THE BASICS OF DEED AND CREED

By Benjamin Blech  
Aronson Books

One of my teachers once described Judaism as a “4000 year old argument.” Perhaps discussion might have been a better descriptor – but one of the intellectual delights of our religion is its dogged refusal to become frozen and totally codified. Literally everything is open to interpretation, except monotheism.

In “Understanding Judaism,” Rabbi Benjamin Blech of Yeshiva’s James Striar School attempts a sweeping analysis and explanation of many of the key questions of what it means to be a Jew. He weighs the qualities of different mitzvot, provides a new way of understanding the Decalogue, and gets to the heart of such compelling questions as “Does Judaism Believe in the Death Penalty?,” “Does God care about non-Jews?,” “Do We Really Have Free Will?,” and one of the most discussed issues of our time, “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People.” Each answer involves a sensitive use of text and a clear, almost simple, style of argument. As the sub-title suggests he sees and extols Judaism’s special nature as a religion of deeds, and nearly every subject is viewed through this lens.

What I found most compelling was Rabbi Blech’s chapters on the Ten Commandments. Beginning with the question of why there are two tablets – he posits that one is intended to define our relationship to God and the other to our dealings with our fellow men – and moving on to an extensive discussion of the difference between Protestant, Catholic and Jewish versions, Rabbi Blech also shows the relationship between each of the commandments on the first tablet and its spatial equivalent on the second tablet. For example, he matches the second commandment “Ye Shall Have No Gods Before Me” with the seventh “You Shall Not Commit Adultery” by showing how many “sages seek complete parity between mortal marriage and marriage with the Almighty.” At one time discussion like this might’ve made me (and I’m sure many other contemporary Jews) squirm a bit at the image of God as lover to man, but Rabbi Blech does a fine job of illustrating how the commentators unabashedly came to this conclusion.

I would highly recommend this book as both a source of information about the deep beauties and complexities of Judaism and a jumping off point for further contemplation and, yes, argument with fellow Jews.

— *Reviewed by Bob Sarlin*

### CONDOLENCES

Congregation Habonim extends its heartfelt condolences to:

Habonim’s Nursery School Director, Cindy Grebow, her husband Ed and daughter, Madeline on the death of Cindy’s mother, Gloria Miller.

Ellie, Rob and Joseph Schaffer on the death of Ellie’s sister, Susan Schlanger

Allison, Adam, Evan and Oliver Epstein on the death of Allison’s grandmother, Grace Dashoff Cooperstein.

Our community mourns the loss of our long-time congregant, Elizabeth Leibson.



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## WHY DOES HABONIM ASK FOR DONATIONS?

The recent Habonim mailing for membership dues asked you to consider making an additional donation. More such invitations will arrive during the year, some by phone calls. Perhaps you wonder why this happens. The short answer is that without the donations that members give voluntarily each year, many of the programs that we all value would be impossible to offer.

Habonim describes itself, proudly, as a *vibrant* neighborhood synagogue. And the adjective, which denotes something that “pulsates with energy,” rings true. You can’t miss the pulse if you are here on Monday afternoons when 11- and 12-year olds in the religious school are buzzing about the halls, or on a Friday evening for a musical Shabbat, or on the frequent occasions when adult members gather to hear a speaker or study a text.

In our bustling neighborhood, Habonim stands out. Its intimate size allows for personal interaction with our spiritual leaders as well as meaningful participation in study, social and other groups. Those opportunities define who we are and why we value the privilege of participating in this community.

As members, if we value the opportunity, then we also must recognize that the dues paid by our small congregation fall far short of the expense necessary to sustain the costs of maintaining our facility, clergy, and staff. In fact, membership dues actually fund less than half of the operating budget of the congregation.

A vital portion of Habonim’s budget – a portion essential to maintaining the energy – comes from donations by members like you. In a typical year, we receive more than 1,000 donations from members to support varied needs and purposes: High Holiday observance, support of the Religious School, flowers for the Bimah, and many more. Donors who pledge \$1,800 or more in a single year are recognized as *Bonim Builders*. Donations of any size can be made on-line at any time at [www.Habonim.net](http://www.Habonim.net).

Special fundraising events serve to strengthen the fabric of our community in addition to enhancing its resources. This year, two major events are scheduled: our 70th Anniversary Gala on November 14th and the Nursery School’s Casino Event and Auction on February 6th. Events like this are planned by volunteer committees whose participation is a great way to network, connect with old friends and make new ones.

Ultimately, the members of our congregation need to support each other as a community where needs are met, spiritual lives are enriched, young minds are educated and everyone has the opportunity to live a fulfilling Jewish life.

— *Larry Neubauer, Richard Rosenbloom and David Singer*