



From Rabbi Josh

How Do We Prepare Ourselves to Receive Torah?



The Sinai Desert, dawn. As the fateful day breaks not a sound is heard. The people huddle at the foot of the mountain, seeking protection from the chill desert air and their apprehension.

The Torah describes the preparations the Israelites are to make as they await God's revelation at the foot of Mt. Sinai: "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mt. Sinai in the sight of all the people." (Exod. 19:10-11) Interestingly, the Torah never relates the spiritual preparations that surely accompanied their anticipation of this momentous third day, the festival of Shavuot, the day on which tradition teaches the Torah was given. In our own times, the seven weeks leading up to Shavuot – known collectively as the *omer* – is traditionally given over to study and contemplation, all in the service of preparing ourselves emotionally and intellectually for the annual celebration of receiving the Torah anew.

Personal preparation – preparing ourselves to recognize and value the connection and

higher purpose innate in transcendent moments of our lives – is not a one-size-fits-all process. We all have techniques for centering ourselves at important moments: maybe a prayer of gratitude, maybe closing our eyes, maybe finding our breath. Perhaps this is why the Torah doesn't tell us how the people prepared spiritually: while our external preparations take on a shared form and content the preparation of the heart is much more individual and private.

This year we will draw on the Shavuot tradition of a night of study as we consider the question: How do we spiritually prepare ourselves to receive Torah? To help us find our own answers to this important question we are creating a Shavuot Spirituality Institute – an opportunity to sample different modalities of spiritual preparation including prayer, study, movement, social action, meditation, and creative expression. Facilitators will invite us to take a journey as we explore different ways of deepening our connection with the Divine and with ourselves. We hope you will join us with an open and seeking heart as we go inside and prepare ourselves to stand with the rest of Israel, quaking, at the foot of the mountain.

B'shalom,

Rabbi Josh

Shavuot Spirituality Institute – Saturday, May 30, 7:30-10:00 PM. Participants will have the opportunity to visit a variety of sessions exploring different modalities of spiritual connection. We will conclude with Havdalah and blintzes.

From the President Rick Dzubow

John Wesley, an 18th century religious leader once wrote: “Do all the good you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.”

As motivational quotes go, this one is a “Home Run.” At a time in our history when we are faced with such an abnormal amount of uncertainty and stress, it is useful to go back to the basics and spend time affirming the wonders of life through deeds of kindness, selflessness, caring, and community. These deeds can be offered to members of your family, to your friends, to members of your community, and to people whose names you will never know.

At a time when you feel your own security fractured by the effects of the recession; at a time when you and your family are facing uncomfortable and unprecedented amounts of uncertainty, I think it is particularly helpful and meaningful to “Do all the good you can, In all the ways you can.” It is particularly helpful because there will always be others facing greater problems, and there will always be people and families with “less”. And it is a particularly meaningful time to “Do all the good you can, In all the ways you can,” because there is no more noble a

time to do for others than when you yourself are feeling more vulnerable.

Our community is such a special one because so many of you “Do all the good you can, In all the ways you can....”. Your generosity towards each other, and towards our community, through the years has been inspiring. The most precious gift you can give a family member, a friend, a stranger, and your community, is the gift of time spent in good and caring ways.

The Or Hadash community will survive these economic challenges because of your caring. The Or Hadash community will be stronger because of your kindness towards each other. And the Or Hadash community will pass on a legacy of values, purpose, and community that would make our parents proud, and that will be given to our children with optimism and hope.

As our 2008 - 2009 year comes to a close, I want to wish you a peaceful, relaxing and fun summer. And I want to thank all of you for being members of the Or Hadash community. See you next year!

Or Hadash Joins the Yes! Coalition Shelley Rosenberg

Has Or Hadash always been welcoming to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people? Yes! Has Or Hadash been officially listed as a welcoming congregation so that people searching for a synagogue will know that? Not until now!

At the December Board meeting, the leadership of Or Hadash voted to become a member of the Yes! Coalition, an interfaith council of faith communities that welcome sexual minorities, their families and friends. The Coalition organizes the *Guide to Welcoming Congregations*, an online list of welcoming congregations throughout the five-county Philadelphia area. Until now, only 12 of 120 listing congregations were synagogues, and Or Hadash was not one of the 5 Reconstructionist congregations listed.

The organization, which is a project of the

Interfaith Working Group, undertakes projects that speak to the religious diversity and justice concerns of the LGBT community. In existence since 2001, Yes! has sponsored or supported several conferences, the interfaith New Freedom Seder, and the first Philly Pride Interfaith Celebration. The organization is currently undertaking a reorganization and outreach effort that will expand the *Guide to Welcoming Congregations*, activate a Speakers Bureau, and plan and coordinate outreach and events that will further the Coalition’s goals. To that end, Shelley Rosenberg, a current Board member and former president of Or Hadash, has joined the organization’s central council as liaison to the Jewish community.

Now, Or Hadash can truly state: Yes, we are welcoming. And, Yes, we are actively reaching out and extending that welcome to all.

Membership Robyn Pollack, Chair

It is hard to believe how quickly the year has gone by. It seems as though we were just welcoming everyone back from summer vacations at our Welcome Back B-B-Q and gearing up for a busy year. And now the school year is winding down and all of our new members really aren't all that new anymore!

During this time, your Membership Committee has been hard at work. The Harold and Renee Berger Synagogue Network for Young Families team spent a considerable amount of time creating a program that they feel will best help our synagogue to attract and retain young families. They will continue their work during the spring, and summer and intend to roll out the program – which will consist of story time events at area bookstores and programming within our synagogue – in the early fall. The Membership Committee also brought the "Train with Cheryl Boot Camp" fitness program to Or Hadash in March. The response was so great; we will be holding this program on a regular basis beginning in October. So lace up your sneakers and join us in the fall! The Membership Committee will also be sponsoring a "Shabbat Stroll" for all of our new members and their host families on Saturday, May 9, at Valley Green. Join us to support our newest

members (who won't be new too much longer!!) and enjoy a great day outside.

Once again we will be holding a series of spring Open Houses. The dates are **Friday, May 1, Saturday, May 2, Sunday, May 3 (school open house), Friday, May 8 and Saturday, May 9**. If you know anyone who might be interested in our congregation, please encourage them to attend. Our sustained viability relies on our membership; so take the initiative and tell people how much you enjoy being a member at Or Hadash and what a real, down-to-earth place it is.

As always, I encourage you to get involved and keep the momentum going. We have an incredible new Community Life chairperson, Gyl Zelesnick, and she has some great ideas she plans on implementing this coming year. Our Inreach Committee, under the leadership of Carolyn Savitsky, is working to address all your issues and concerns, and to help make Or Hadash exactly what you want it to be. But we want **you**. We want you to participate, to take ownership, and to work with us to make our congregation the best that it can be. This is **your** community. And like anything else in life, the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. So talk to us, tell us what you want – make Or Hadash your own.

The Or Hadash Life-Cycle Garden: An Oasis of Healing, and Reflection Rhoda Gansler and Beth Alper

Thanks to your generous financial and physical support, our Or Hadash garden is a reality! The sound of our waterfall soothes the soul, and the benches are ready to provide you with welcome rest. Our perennial trees and bushes have been planted, thanks to all who have worked so hard this past year. With the advent of the warm weather, we will be able to plant the annuals. This is truly a *Life-Cycle* garden: an oasis of healing, meditation and reflection. Several members have told us that they already come to the garden to just sit and take in its beauty and

serenity. We hope that you too will find this a place of tranquility.

We invite you to join us at our dedication ceremony on Sunday, May 17, 2009 at 10:00 am, when we will celebrate the efforts of all those who so generously and graciously donated their time, their funds, and their sweat equity to create this special space at Or Hadash. Please come and sit peacefully in the beautiful spring weather to appreciate this new creation at the synagogue.

From the Education Director Lori Rubin

I recently returned to Or Hadash from an extraordinary experience, and I'd like to share it with you. But, first, let me give you some background information. For many years, Or Hadash's confirmation class has participated in a program called Panim El Panim, which literally means "face to face." In prior years, our confirmation class teachers, Ruth and Jules Mermelstein, have accompanied the class. Last summer, I had the privilege of participating in one of Panim's programs, The National Educators' Institute for Jewish Service-Learning, held at last year's CAJE conference. After this seminar, I asked Ruth and Jules if I could chaperone the next class' visit to a Panim seminar so I could experience, in "real time," what I had learned at the conference. They willingly obliged.

What a phenomenal experience! We had the opportunity to:

- ◆ hear from two formerly homeless individuals about their experience.
- ◆ ponder how we would spend 1 million dollars if we had it. (Jewish organizations, cultural organizations, our family, our congregation, to help those in need, etc.)
- ◆ meet with homeless people; and give them toiletries and socks that we'd brought with us.
- ◆ visit an agency that helps elderly residents with household tasks.
- ◆ attend a meeting with an advocacy group that taught us how to lobby.
- ◆ meet with a legislative aide from Senator Casey's office to share our thoughts on various hot topics.

In addition to all of those things, we met Jewish teens from Chicago, Indiana, New York and Florida. We were able to visit some national monuments, and tour some of Washington D.C.

I am sharing this with you as I did with our students in grades 2 to 6 during a recent Sunday service. One thing we learned from the two speakers that had been homeless is that we should treat all human beings with respect and dignity. My grandmother used to tell me to walk away from homeless people we would see while visiting Center City. That is not the lesson I'd like to share. What I would like to share is the idea that when you see people who are different from you, or people who are in a difficult situation like homelessness, you should try not to be afraid of the differences and to try to take the time to see if there is something you can do to help. It may be listening to someone tell his story, or it may be donating your time or just sharing a warm smile as opposed to a fearful glance. What a big difference one can make by just saying "Hello." This can be done not only with homeless people on the street, but with everyone you see. "Pay it forward." Say hello to elderly residents in nursing homes, say hello to people who pass you by in stores or malls. You never know when you might make someone's day a little bit happier.

As we finish our school year, I'd like us to remember that we have the power to help others. This is one of the reasons why we choose to belong to Or Hadash. We can help others, and when we are need, they can help us. This holds true for those in our own community as well as outside our community. Whether it is making contributions to organizations like The Federation of Greater Philadelphia, which has helped us in the past with scholarships for Jewish camps and monies to defray the cost of religious school to those families who need additional funding, or helping homeless families as we do every year at Or Hadash, or just keeping our eyes open for opportunities to help others, we have the power to help and we need to remember to use it!

About Our New Mosaics

Arlene Golbin Burns

In response to questions about Or Hadash's newest artwork, here is some information about how the mosaics came to adorn our recently dedicated entry. Members of the Aesthetics Committee, chaired by Michael Oswald, were charged with creating a beautiful and welcoming space as the new entrance was being designed. Different materials were considered, a budget established, and so the process and dialogue began. The idea of "doing something in mosaics" emerged as a frontrunner. It was the amazing February 2008 congregational trip to Israel that "clinched it." After visiting a number of archaeological sites, museums and even contemporary structures, it became evident that this ancient medium is an integral element of our homeland's visual history.

We then began the process of design creation and locating an affordable craft team willing to collaborate and able to execute our design concepts. We partnered with Phoenician Arts, a third generation company, which specializes in reviving this ancient craft. They were willing to modify their traditional Tree of Life design to our specifications and to produce the original Or Hadash design above the door. The former incorporates the traditional Hebrew greeting: "Shalom Aleichem" in an arched motif, which is repeated in different architectural and decorative contexts throughout our beautiful building. The latter embellishes the name of our congregation with organic motifs related to forms in the larger

piece and elsewhere in our building.

I did the design work, sending my colored drawings to Phoenician Arts. The stones themselves determined the color palette available. The hand-made mosaics are of all natural marble and some semi-precious stones. No dye is used – the colors are inherent to the stone itself and will last forever. The techniques are based on those of the Ancients. Thanks to Sandy Malkin, Laura Feller and Gail Morrison Hall for their feedback and support regarding the designs.

The mosaics were shipped to us stabilized on mesh backings. Then came the grouting process. Jeff Alper, our talented "how-to maven," grouted and cleaned the large Tree of Life piece and expertly framed both works. He also determined the mechanism for safely mounting these heavy creations. Merav Nesvisky grouted the smaller piece. (She is the craftsperson who worked with Or Hadash students to create the original mosaic at the far end of the adjacent hallway.) Thank you Jeff and Merav.

Our goal was to create art which not only welcomes all to our synagogue, but which also fuses ancient traditions with the architectural and decorative specifics of our Or Hadash home. We hope this goal was met and that our mosaics will provide you all with pleasure.

Cancellation of Or Hadash Family Trip to Israel

Unfortunately, the family trip to Israel, which was originally scheduled for December 2009, has been cancelled. Many reasons contributed to the decision to cancel the trip, notably the increased cost for families of 4 or more people touring during a peak travel time, in the midst of an economic recession. Or Hadash is committed to planning a trip with a similar itinerary at a future date, and we all share in the disappointment that this trip did not go forward. However, if families cannot go to Israel at this time, Israel can come to us in the form of activities, including the recent photography exhibit and future celebrations, Shabbat services, discussion groups, lectures, and perhaps Israeli craft and food shows for the holidays.

Beth Alper, Chair, Israel Committee
Along with Jennifer Hoagland, Lori Rubin, and Rabbi Josh

B'Nai Mitzvah

May 2

Rachel Hyman,
daughter of Linda Poley and Mark Hyman

May 16

Haley Schwartz,
daughter of Diana and Robert Schwartz

May 23

Zoe Dubin,
daughter of Rachel and David Dubin

May 30

Jake Kalick,
son of Monica and Michael Kalick

June 6

Caroline Simon,
daughter of Catherine and Peter Simon

June 20

Elijah Kirschen,
son of Joseph Kirschen

MAZEL TOV!

RITUAL COMMITTEE

Marty Jacobs, Chairperson

SPIRITUALITY

The mission statement of the Or Hadash Ritual Committee reads, “To work to provide a means to meet congregants’ spiritual needs within a framework of evolving Jewish Reconstructionist principles.” It’s interesting that the word “ritual” is not mentioned anywhere in this statement. One might argue that Jewish Ritual is intended to increase spirituality – but not all would agree. Spirituality is more often associated with other religions (e.g., Buddhism), although many find elements of spirituality in *kabala*, Jewish Renewal, Chasidism, and even Reconstructionism. In fact, Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, speaks at length about spirituality, in *Judaism as a Civilization* (p. 405):

“The Judaism of the past was no doubt a spiritual civilization, but it was circumscribed by a limited knowledge of God and the world ...” Today we find it possible for a civilization to express itself spiritually and to feel the sense of destiny without claiming to have experienced theophany, without resorting to a conception of direct cause-and-effect relationship between obedience to God and the fortunes of the individual, and without having to assume that the only way a new world will ever emerge out of the present chaos will be through some supernatural cataclysm. The spirituality of the Jewish civilization in its fourth stage can dispense with all these assumptions. It will consist mainly in the effort to foster knowingly and deliberately the historical tendency of the Jewish religion to progress in the direction of universal truth and social idealism.

Kaplan’s arguments may not always be easy to

apply in practice. However, Rabbi Josh recently challenged the Ritual Committee to continue our role in setting ritual policy, but also to participate in deepening congregational spirituality. The committee’s response has been enthusiastic - and favorable! We started by identifying several areas of spirituality for further involvement, including *tikun olam* (rebuilding the world or social action), *tikun ha-nefesh* (rebuilding the soul – e.g., chanting, meditation), prayer, and to investigate what Kaplan called the “God-idea.” Many of these themes are already present in our congregational life, but not necessarily explicitly identified with spirituality. Our committee’s activity in the coming months will focus on collaborating with other committees and groups within the Or Hadash family to further develop these topics in ways that will fulfill our mission of meeting congregants’ spiritual needs. Stay tuned for further developments!

Annual Congregational Meeting May 15, 2009

6:30 - Congregational dinner

Please RSVP to Laurie Albert at office@orhadash.com, or call 215-283-0276, to tell us who and how many will be joining us for dinner.

7:00 - Congregational Meeting
Get updates on committees, renovations, budget, and board positions.

8:00 - Erev Shabbat service with Choir
Become an active participant in your congregation!

Office News

Included in your membership renewal packet is a form marked Family Profile. We ask that you carefully review the information on the Family Profile page and return it promptly to the office with any corrections or additions.

This information forms the basis for what goes into the Or Hadash directory. I recently had someone tell me that their listing in the directory had been incorrect for years. If they had just returned the form with corrections, this would never have occurred.

Together we can make sure that the directory and our database is correct. Thanks for working with me on this.

Laurie Albert, Synagogue Administrator

Correction

Jan Goldman's poem "Making Soup" will be published in the 2009 edition of The Jewish Women's Literary Annual. .

Condolences

To Joe Adler on the passing of his cousin, Freddie Oyle.

To Greta Bunin on the passing of her father, Julius Bunin, father-in-law of Andrew Gale and grandfather of Susannah.

To Jan Goldman on the passing of her sister, Marilyn Goldin, sister-in-law of Nick and aunt of Jill, Jenny and Josh.

To Cheryl Kripke Cohen on the passing of her mother, Emma Kripke, mother-in-law of Jay and grandmother of Lenny and Dan.

To Fran Swartz on the passing of her father, Leonard Fomalont, father-in-law of Ron and Grandfather of Andrew and Robbie.

We mourn the passing of Roz Handel who was a founding member of Or Hadash in 1982.

Upcoming Events for May & June

Three-Part Harmony Shabbat

Friday, May 1st and June 5th

We will celebrate May birthdays AND Israel's birthday in May and June birthdays in June.

Tot Shabbat - 6:00 pm

Pot Luck (dairy Kosher) dinner - 6:30 pm

Family service - 7:00 pm

AWAKENING THE DREAMER

Sunday, May 3rd at 12:30 pm

Environmental Working Group sponsors Exciting Symposium. The program will include a special guest, scientist David Ulansey. Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, Betti Kahn and Chuck Putnam will facilitate the discussion. Come be inspired, informed and inclined to action.

Dedication of our LIFE-CYCLE GARDEN

Sunday, May 17 at 10 am

Cheryl Kripke Cohen and Sandy Saull will add beautiful music to this very special celebration.

OUTDOOR Shabbat Service

Friday, May 22 at 7:00 pm

Please note the change of time from the regular schedule.

Shavuot Service and Confirmation

Thursday, May 28th at 7:00 pm

SHAVUOT SPIRITUALITY INSTITUTE

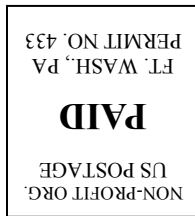
Saturday, May 30th at 7:30 pm

Shabbat Schmooze - Friday, June 19

See the flyer in the May mid-month to sign up!

OPEN HOUSES – Friday, May 1, Saturday, May 2, Sunday, May 3; and Friday, May 8 and Saturday, May 9. Please bring a friend, a neighbor, coworker, or anyone who might be interested in checking us out! ALL ARE WELCOME!

Address Service Requested



A Reconstructionist Congregation
190 Camp Hill Road
Fort Washington, Pennsylvania 19034



Save these Dates

Open Houses May 1, 2, and 3; May 8 and 9	Three Part Harmony Shabbat May 1
Annual Congregational Meeting May 15	Life-Cycle Garden Dedication May 17
Shavuot Service and Confirmation May 28	Shavuot Spirituality Institute May 30
Three Part Harmony Shabbat June 5	Shabbat Schmooze June 19