

B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation

420 WHITEHALL RD., ALBANY, NY 12208

E-mail: office@bnaisholom.albany.ny.us

NOVEMBER 2021

Phone: 518-482-5283

Visit us at <http://www.bnaisholomalbany.org>

CHESVAN/KISLEV 5782

B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation is a Brit Olam Congregation in covenant with the world – because we seek the world we want, not the world as it is.

JOIN US FOR PRAYER, MEDITATION, CELEBRATION AND STUDY

Zoom links for services are sent out weekly.

Please call the office for information about telephone access to prayer services.

Friday, November 5	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, November 6	EXTENDED STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, November 12	TOT SHABBAT SERVICE	5:00 PM
	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, November 13	TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, November 19	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	7:30 PM
Saturday, November 20	TORAH STUDY	9:30 AM
Friday, November 26	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	7:30 PM
Saturday, November 27	TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, December 3	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	6:13 PM
Saturday, December 4	EXTENDED STUDY	10:00 AM

Visit <https://reformjudaism.org/learning> for each week's parashah.

B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation, a Reform Jewish synagogue, is a community that fosters individual, family and congregational spirituality by engaging in worship and prayer, promoting learning on all levels, supporting each other's needs, bettering our community and our world, and forging connections with worldwide Jewry.

We take pride in being warm, welcoming, informal, progressive, open-minded, diverse, and participatory.

We strive to create a vibrant Jewish present, linking our ancient traditions with the promise of the future.

FROM OUR RABBI...

Shalom, B'nai Sholom!

The Jewish month of Tishre provides lots of hustle and bustle. It's the month in which we mark Rosh Hashanah, Shabbat Shuvah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Atzeret/Simchat Torah. Whew! Right on the heels of this holiday marathon, though, comes the month of Cheshvan – the only month on the Jewish calendar that has no holidays other than Shabbat. Some lament the monotony of just another average month, but at B'nai Sholom we've found ways to keep things exciting!

For example, Saturday, October 16, brought us our first Shabbat morning Torah service since I joined the congregation. We not only celebrated the milestone anniversary of David Liebschutz's bar mitzvah (followed by a tasty outdoor kiddush under a tent), but had an opportunity to pray together in what I hope will become a more frequent practice in our synagogue. Just as we can enjoy Shabbat during a month with no "special" holidays, so too can we enjoy a Torah service without needing to wait for the "excuse" of a lifecycle event... though of course those are always a blessing when they come around!

The following day, Sunday the 17th, we held simultaneous events: a winter clothing drive run by the Social Action/Social Justice Committee, and a "Meet the Rabbi" event hosted by the Membership Committee. Both were great successes. I was particularly glad not only to meet some new community members who were interested in learning more about our congregation, but to get a chance to meet several members of B'nai Sholom with whom I hadn't had much chance to talk previously. And for those who took the "Guess to Know the Rabbi" quiz in advance, there was also a grand reveal at which I disclosed the answers to questions that inspired fervent interest, such as my favorite flavor of ice cream!

This month of Cheshvan may be a breather from official holidays, but as a congregation we continue to create our own moments of celebration, conversation and connection at every time of year. Plus, I – and several committees – have been using this time to plan exciting services, classes, events and initiatives for the future. Stay tuned!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Danielle Weisbrot

PS – For those who were unable to attend the Meet the Rabbi event, here are the quiz answers, as promised! Favorite holiday: **Passover**. Favorite ice cream: **vanilla bean**. My bat mitzvah portion included: **the priestly blessing**. I have never had a pet: **cat**. I have read more than six times: **Pride & Prejudice**. I would most like to emulate: **Devorah** (though the other Biblical leaders are also good role models!). My favorite snack is: **all of the above** (cheese, chocolate *and* Jujubes)!

FROM OUR PRESIDENT...

This year, as we move through the month of November toward secular Thanksgiving (which barely gets in before Chanukah begins), in our weekly Torah readings we encounter the troubled family histories of the patriarchs and matriarchs. The month begins with the bitter fraternal conflict between Jacob and Esau. It then discusses Jacob's problematic relationships with his father-in-law and his acknowledged and unacknowledged wives and reveals the horrific tale of Dinah's rape and her brothers' bloody revenge. The last parashah of the month winds up with Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery, Judah's unintentional fathering of two sons with his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar, and Joseph's narrow escape from consequences for a false accusation of rape by his employer's wife. If nothing else, anyone who makes it through a close study this month will hopefully find that any long-buried family disputes or tensions that trouble their Thanksgiving gatherings pale in comparison.

Our history could provide decades of full employment for an entire office of family therapists. Some of the problems relate to the ancient structural practices of favoring first-born sons, encouraging multiple wives, viewing women's sexuality as a possession of the men in their lives and the curious practice of Levirate marriage (in which the brother of a deceased man is required to wed his widow). Others, however, look even to our modern eyes to be timeless conflicts and psychological harms. They arise from parental favoring of some children over others, jealousy, infertility in a culture that highly values motherhood, accusations of sexual assault and misconduct and the responses to these accusations. We know the story, so it's no spoiler to reveal that the children of Jacob, except for Dinah, all wind up reconciling. Nonetheless, Jacob's life ends on a somewhat disquieting note. He distributes both blessings and curses to his sons. He also replicates the favoring of a younger child over an older one that marked his own life irrevocably, privileging Joseph's younger son Ephraim over his elder son Manasseh.

These stories don't guide us through our own struggles with our natal families. They do underline the power of family connections, and we see the Eternal continuing to commit to the children of Israel despite their jealousies, sins and struggles with each other. But these struggles come off in the text as real and deeply bitter – one can't imagine Joseph and his brothers being able to sit down together for a festive meal for appearance's sake, or even in order to make their own father feel better. Only by going through a long process of loss and mourning on both sides were they able to reach a place where reconciliation was possible.

Even in that space, as modern readers we mark the disappearance of Dinah from the text, her tragedy having erased her from memory. This may not be so alien to those of us who have seen irrevocable rifts open in our own families. We may gather for holiday celebrations only to feel an absence wrought by death or estrangement that is too difficult to speak or acknowledge, and so it remains silent but felt.

For this Thanksgiving, many of us will be grateful for what we have and for the people who remain in our lives. We have managed to navigate the last year and a half, despite

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difficulty, anxiety and tragedy, which we have all experienced to different degrees. Some of us, however, struggle with big holiday gatherings where everyone is expected to embrace and project an unproblematic façade of love, joy and family togetherness, despite the persistence of pain and trauma. Others may find our deepest joy and gratitude by gathering with our families of choice.

Regardless, Thanksgiving provides us with an opportunity to reflect both critically and lovingly on what we have gained from our family relationships, even those that have been complicated. Further, keeping in mind the complexity and ambiguity of how love and connections sometimes work in families may help us to understand our companions and friends who find the season of large family gatherings to be difficult.

I wish you all a happy and healthy month of November and a meaningful and positive Thanksgiving!

L'shalom,

Julie Novkov

Update from the Reopening Task Force

The Task Force has determined that in light of continued high COVID-19 case rates in Albany County, it would be prudent to maintain lists of attendees at B'nai Shalom services and events. Thus, when you attend an in-person service or event at the synagogue, please be prepared to sign in. Should we receive notification that anyone in attendance has tested positive for COVID-19, we will use the sign-in sheet to inform other attendees in a timely fashion without identifying the person who has tested positive. We hope that this new practice will help us to maintain as safe an environment as we can.

News from the Social Action/Social Justice Committee

Time To Call Governor Kathy Hochul

Last year, the Delaware River Basin Commission, made up of the governors of four states and one federal representative, voted to ban fracking permanently in the Delaware River Basin watershed – a source of drinking water for 15 million people.

Now we need Governor Hochul and the other commissioners to take the next step: a full ban on ALL fracking-related activities in the region. Only a complete ban is sufficient to protect our water, including banning the storage, treatment and disposal of fracking waste as well as the withdrawal of water for use in fracking elsewhere. Fracking waste is highly toxic and contains radioactive elements, posing a threat to our health, communities and environment.

Regulations regarding these dangerous fracking-related activities are under consideration and there is a short period of time before the draft regulations are released, so now is the time to call....

PLEASE CALL GOVERNOR HOCHUL: 877-235-6547.

You can also sign up for weekly alerts about opposing fossil fuel infrastructure in New York by texting HOCHULTUESDAYS to 23321.

PLEASE SHARE THIS ALERT WIDELY!

Still Dishing It Out at the Soup Kitchen

Usually, the number of patrons at the Sister Maureen Joyce Soup Kitchen is low at the beginning of the month (money for the month has not yet run out), but on October 3, 70 people were served. This number is close to the 73 people served when B'nai Sholom worked the kitchen on the last Sunday in August. We will need to keep track to see if there is an increasing need for food in the coming months.

The take-and-go meals were cooked and packed by Steve Klein, Janet Strominger, Ian Duckor, Hayden Schwartz and Seth Edelman. The baked goods were provided by Bettina Stoller, Lois Gordon, Valerie Tabak and Becky Marvin.

We would like to keep providing a sweet treat each time we are in charge. Becky Marvin has offered the use of her freezer, so when you are baking please make an extra dozen cookies or bars.

Also, please consider making a contribution to Fresh Food for Families so that we can add fresh produce to the meals. Simply mail a check (made out to B'nai Sholom) with "Fresh Food" on the memo line. You can read more about this new initiative in the October Bulletin.

And one last note: if you are interested in volunteering at the soup kitchen, contact Steve Klein or Janet Strominger.

News and Thoughts from our Ritual Committee

Light In Winter

Our New Year started off on a beautifully communal note, with Rabbi Weisbrot's first High Holy Days services. Many of our congregants participated and attended both in person and by Zoom and felt especially connected with B'nai Sholom.

Now, as the days shorten and winter approaches, we look for ways to take advantage of that connection and bring extra light into our days. How can B'nai Sholom help us deepen that connection and enhance our commitment to our Jewish heritage?

Just a few weeks ago, there was a special Saturday Torah service, as congregant David Liebschutz read his bar mitzvah portion on the 50th anniversary of that celebration. Shabbat Torah services are a great way to deepen our understanding of the central document of Judaism, and the Ritual Committee is working with Rabbi Weisbrot to plan more of them this year. And watch for information about Shabbat Shira, when we can focus on making joyful noise, on January 14.

Meanwhile, every Saturday morning, the Adult Education Committee sponsors open Torah Study, with the hope that more and more people will participate. Sessions begin at 10 a.m. and are led by Rabbi Weisbrot and by educator Steven Stark-Riemer. The group is eclectic, open and welcoming. In the long, long tradition of Jewish study, we begin at the beginning of the Torah and consider the weekly portion three weeks of the month. The fourth week is an extended session as we work our way through the Prophets and the Writings not included in the Five Books of Moses. Beginners are absolutely welcomed! Fresh voices add to the chorus of learners, enriching the experience for all. Drop in and check it out. You may be surprised at how fresh and fun the sessions are.

And speaking of experiences for all, now that the season of major holidays is past, the Ritual Committee will be soliciting suggestions for the timing of Shabbat evening services. Right now, two weeks a month they are held at 6:13 p.m., and the rest of the weeks the start time is 7:30 p.m. Does this suit you? Do you have any other ideas? Let us know, as we work to accommodate as many people as possible.

Light in winter: B'nai Sholom is a beacon as the year begins anew!

Calling Our Musical Congregants

Making a joyful noise on Shabbat Shira, when we read the Song of the Sea, is a beloved Jewish tradition. On Friday, January 14, we hope singers and instrumentalists will lead the congregation in a musical celebration before and during service. Perhaps you'd like to sing one prayer in the liturgy? Or play an interlude during a silent prayer or before services? Or prepare a group song? This is your chance to share your musical gift with our B'nai Sholom. Contact Joseph DeFronzo at jdefronzo1@gmail.com to explore the possibilities.

Lech Lecha Drash

D'var Torah by David Liebschutz

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Delivered by David October 16, 2021,
on the 50th anniversary of his bar mitzvah)

Almost 50 years ago, a somewhat pudgy boy with a high-pitched voice walked up to the Torah in front of his family and friends at Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester and read the following words:

The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing, and I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."

What was I thinking then and what am I thinking now about this parasha and its place in our story?

My younger self was probably told how important this parasha was and that it marked the beginning of what we would now call Judaism and how honored I should be to be reading it. I don't think I really understood then why it was so important and was much more focused on completing the task and getting gifts and being able to have a party.

So, how does 50 more years of experience and context on which to reflect help me understand this parasha? I think quite a lot, some of which I would like to share with you this morning.

While some Christians talk about "getting the call" and being saved, most Jews don't think about their connection to Judaism in the same way. We often think about Judaism as something we are born into or have adopted as a religion because of a relationship with a partner or a community.

Yet how should we think about "the call" that Abram got to leave his comfortable surroundings in Haran and go to a place that he had never been and to be "father of a great nation"?

As someone who thinks and teaches about leadership and works with many leaders in our Jewish and larger communities, I now more than ever am convinced that the call that Abram got is indeed a model for all of us to harken to.

Not surprisingly, I consulted my "go-to" guide for how to think about the Torah in a leadership context, Lessons in Leadership by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom.

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Sachs says that Lech Lecha is about the courage not to conform and to teach your children and your household afterwards to follow the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just (Genesis 18:19). According to Sachs, Abraham's great gift to humanity is that he was prepared to be different and not simply go with the flow. He is the consummate example of someone who had great influence but no actual power. In other words, Abraham could not force anyone to follow him by using coercion, but follow him they did, and now billions of Christians, Muslims and Jews all trace their lineage back to Abraham's leadership and willingness to swim upstream against the tide of history.

Bestselling author Bruce Feiler's book on Abraham discusses his influence on the world's three great monotheistic religions and how he became a singular figure in history for many of us, perhaps even more so than Moses, Jesus or Mohammed. Abraham's genius was that as an adult he was able to pivot and be a leader. As Sachs notes, quoting management guru Warren Bennis:

By the time we reach puberty, the world has shaped us to a greater extent than we realize. Our family, friends and society in general have told us – by word and example – how to be. But people begin to become leaders at that moment when they decide for themselves how to be. (Sachs, p 16)

While it is often hard to swim against popular sentiment and “do the right thing,” I think that as I look back on my 50 years as a Jewish adult I have tried, although not always successfully, to do the “right and just” thing and not be swayed by peer pressure to do the popular thing. The few times when I have not been true to my values, I have regretted it and vowed to do better next time.

And while at the time I didn't know that my bar mitzvah portion would have such a strong influence on my path, it seems that I have continued to go back to its themes over and over again. For example, I chose the following quote for my college yearbook – “If I am not for myself, who will be for me, and if I am only for myself, what am I and if not now when.” (Pirke Avot 1:14) These words, attributed to 2nd-century CE Rabbi Hillel, have been a watchword for me and relate quite well to Abraham's willingness to embrace not only a singular path for himself but for a people and to act upon them quickly.

So, have I been as great as Abraham and led a people to be a model to the world? No, I haven't, but then again most of us don't get such a chance to do anything so grand. What I have tried to do is to follow not only Rabbi Hillel but also another early 2nd-century sage, Rabbi Tarfon, who said, “It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.” That is, I have tried not to neglect the work and be a leader and role model for others even if I am not the one who always gets to cross the finish line.

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While my 13 year-old self didn't know how things would turn out 50 years hence, I think that he would have been generally pleased at the path that life took. My almost 63 year-old self is too. I am a very lucky person to be part of a family and a community that has supported me so well. Thanks to my wonderful wife of 36 years, Libby, my terrific daughters, Jen and Rebecca, my mother Sarah and sister Jane, and my B'nai Sholom community of 31 years for all of your support. I could not have done this without you!!

Finally, I want to thank Rabbi Danielle Weisbrot, who despite being our new settled rabbi for less than four months, has been incredibly supportive of my taking this on and adding to her already full-to-overflowing plate of things to attend to this fall.

Shabbat Shalom!



Our Recent Kibbutzniks

Melissa Putterman-Hoffmann and Gary Hoffmann

In honor of the Reopening and Safety Committees

Gail Golderman and Rochelle Goldfarb

In appreciation of the Reopening Task Force

Susan Aron and Joseph DeFronzo

With grateful appreciation to Phil Teumim and Ann Lowenfels for their tireless and skillful technical work

Deb Adler

In honor of Melissa Putterman-Hoffman's tremendous work on the High Holy Days

Becky and Ben Marvin

To celebrate the birth of our grandson, Noah Joseph Kitchell

Liz and Lorn Gingrich

In honor of the New Year and our new Rabbi. Wishing Rabbi Weisbrot a sweet New Year!

Lois Gordon

In appreciation of Rebecca Pacuk, Elizabeth Huntley, Rabbi Weisbrot, David Ray and Phil Teumim for the beautiful melodies during the High Holidays

Melissa Putterman-Hoffmann and Gary Hoffmann

In honor of Jillian's birthday

Lois Gordon

In memory of Bob Gordon

The Goldberg Family

In honor of the 50th Anniversary of David Liebschutz's bar mitzvah

Susan Aron and Joseph DeFronzo

In honor of David Liebschutz as he celebrates the 50th Anniversary of his bar mitzvah

The following Yahrzeits will be observed in November.

11/5 Rachel Levy*; Vicki Adler; Samuel Abrams*; Lillian Golderman; Julie Fiks*; Herman Schoenbach*; Seymour Schwartzman*; Abraham Cogen

11/12 Irving Kaufman; Louise Degroult; Selma B. Kuperman*; Sallie Kaplan; David Bach*; Rose Parets*; Teddy Knee; Elenore Morse; Paulette Tabak; Fred Hauptman; Emery Sennesh; Albert Marcus*; Sylvia Goldstein Marcus*

11/19 Estelle Nitka; Norman Rosenthal; Joyce Malkin; Ruth Bosin; Irving Oblas*; Samuel K. Jaffe*; Betty Feldman; Ida Sennesh

11/26 Mildred Aronson*; Nusia Reichbach*; Abraham Porter; Minnie Strassberg; Simon Semelisky*; Elihu Propp*; Frances Rudinger; Ray Stephany; Richard L. Brower*; Sanford Liebschutz

**denotes that a Perpetual Memorial has been established.*

The Congregation Notes with Thanks These Contributions:

General Fund

In memory of **Ruth Devore** by Barbara and Jack Devore

In honor of **Debbie Youngelman** by Barbara and Jack Devore

In memory of **Gordon Edelman** by Seth Edelman

In memory of **Michael Goody** by Nancy Goody

In memory of **Rae Goody** by Nancy Goody

In memory of **Sarah Cohen** by Nancy Goody

In memory of **Charlotte Sacks** by Paula Philo

With thanks for recognizing my family in the **Book of Remembrance** by Barry Ikler

A contribution from Jeffrey and Teresa Weisbrot

Circle of Life Fund

In honor of **this year's High Holy Days at B'nai Sholom** by Ellie and Randy Davis

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

In honor of **Rabbi Danielle Weisbrot on the occasion of her first High Holy Days as B'nai Sholom's spiritual leader** by Becky and Ben Marvin

A contribution from Jeffrey and Teresa Weisbrot

Mazal Tov!

...to Ellie and Randy Davis on the marriage of their daughter, Tamra Davis, to Ryan Dolan on September 23 in California.

B'nai Sholom Legacy Society

Ensuring the Future
of B'nai Sholom ...



... Creating a Jewish Legacy Today!

It's a great time to join us!

As we begin a new chapter of B'nai Sholom's history
with Rabbi Danielle Weisbrot, help ensure B'nai Sholom
will continue to thrive in the future!

Contact a member of the Legacy Committee for more information:
Mimi Bruce, Chair; Libby Liebschutz, Barry Pendergrass, Dave Ray and
Stuart Schwartz

"As my ancestors planted for me, so do I plant for those who will come after me." -- Talmud Ta'anit 23

Acclaimed Israeli Pianist Shai Vosner in Concert; Special Ticket Savings Available to B'nai Sholom Congregants

The Albany Symphony Orchestra is presenting acclaimed Israeli pianist Shai Vosner at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall on Saturday, Nov. 13, at 3 PM and 7:30 PM. Discounted tickets at 25% off are available to our congregants and others affiliated with synagogues throughout the Capital Region. Check the flyer in this issue for more information. To purchase tickets, call or email Tiffany Y. Wright at the Albany Symphony: 518-465-4755 x145, or tiffanyw@albansymphony.com.

RABBI: Danielle Weisbrot can be reached at rabiweisbrot@bnaisholom.albany.ny.us

RABBI EMERITUS: Donald P. Cashman

PRESIDENT: Julie Novkov can be reached at julienovkov@hotmail.com

OFFICE MANAGER: Christine Blackman can be reached at

christine@bnaisholom.albany.ny.us

BOOKKEEPER: Maryann Wygel can be reached at bookkeeper@bnaisholom.albany.ny.us

OFFICE HOURS: TUE/WED/THURS/FRI 9:30 AM–4:30 PM

Articles and news received after the deadline are subject to omission.

As a rule, the Bulletin deadline is the 2nd Wednesday of every month. Adherence to the deadline is critical to ensuring that the Bulletin is sent out in a timely manner.

Period Covered

Deadline

December.....November 10

January.....December 8