

B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation

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E-mail: office@bnaisholomalbany.org

January 2024

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

Tevet/Adar I 5784

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, January 5	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	7:00 PM
Saturday, January 6	EXTENDED STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, January 12	TOT SHABBAT SERVICE	5:30 PM
	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	7:00 PM
	with Synagogue Scholar Martha Rozett	
Saturday, January 13	TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, January 19	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	7:00 PM
Saturday, January 20	TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, January 26	SHABBAT SHIRAH SERVICE	7:00 PM
Saturday, January 27	TORAH STUDY	10:00 AM
Friday, February 2	KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICE	7:00 PM
	with guest speaker Rabbi Lauren Tuchman	
Saturday, February 3	TORAH 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...

At B'nai Sholom, we have many regular opportunities to study Torah. At Shabbat services, we hear about *parashat hashavuah* – the Torah portion of the week; some of those comments are printed in the Bulletin as well. Monthly Board meetings begin with a teaching as well. And on Shabbat mornings, our weekly Torah study sessions are marked by lively debate as well as historical and linguistic nuance (not to mention a monthly side-trip to the Prophets!). Torah is our home base and a consistent throughline for Jewish life.

“Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.” Ben Bag Bag’s famous quote – as understood by the commentators – is an endorsement for continued Torah study. No matter how many times we read the five books of Moses, he suggests, we will always find something new. And however modern the challenges or experiences we encounter may be, we’ll always be able to find a parallel for them in our sacred scripture.

The irony, though, is that Ben Bag Bag’s teaching comes not from *the Torah* itself, but from the Mishnah – a collection of rabbinic writings that helped form the basis of the Talmud and is part of what’s known as the “Oral Torah.” We source our Jewish wisdom from a wide variety of texts and teachings, some more frequently quoted than others. A great one-stop shop for many popular Jewish maxims that we (re)cite, sing, and live by is the very book of Mishnah that contains Ben Bag Bag’s statement: ***Pirkei Avot (The Chapters/Ethics of the Fathers)***.

Fairly unique among the tractates of Mishnah, Pirkei Avot is primarily composed of short ethical statements and reflections on life without halachic debates on how to observe Jewish law properly. This makes it particularly accessible for all kinds of studiers, even those not deeply versed in Jewish texts. Starting this month, I’ll be leading a multi-part study of Pirkei Avot, going at our own pace until we finish its six (short) chapters. Please join us! The first two sessions are scheduled for **Thursdays, January 11 and 25 at 7:30 pm (via Zoom)**. Look for the link in the Weekly e-announcements. I hope to see you there!

If you need a little more encouragement to study, just remember:

On three things does the world stand: on Torah, on worship and on lovingkindness.

- Pirkei Avot 1:2

L’shalom,

Rabbi Danielle Weisbrot

Changes Proposed to B'nai Sholom By-laws; Special Congregational Meeting Set for January 30, 2024

Each year after the secular New Year, the Nominating Committee convenes to establish a proposed roster of individuals who are willing to serve on the Board of Trustees, including some who agree to serve as officers (president, president-elect, vice president, finance vice president, treasurer and secretary).

Within the last few years, it has become challenging to identify congregants willing to take on these roles. Our current by-laws do not allow us to tap into all the congregants who are committed and talented and who might want to serve. To widen our pool of candidates and to better align with our inclusion goals, we propose modifying our by-laws. We see the need for two changes:

- Proposed change #1 - Some who have expressed interest in the position of president have been reluctant to take it on due to the time commitment. Several prospective nominees have asked to job share, accepting the position of co-president. The current by-laws do not allow for co-presidents, so we are asking the congregation to approve an amendment that would add the option of co-president and co-president-elect to the current officers. If the amendment is approved, the by-laws would allow for there to be, at most, two co-presidents, two co-presidents-elect and one vice president, finance vice president, treasurer and secretary.

- Proposed change #2 – Although non-Jewish partners of Jewish members are entitled to membership and participate in most of our congregational life, the existing by-laws do not allow them to serve on the Board of Trustees. We are requesting the congregation approve an amendment that would allow non-Jewish members to serve on the board and to serve as vice president, finance vice-president, treasurer or secretary. The positions of president and president-elect (or co-president or co-president-elect if amendment #1 passes) would still require membership in the Jewish faith.

Many conversations with our leadership have brought us to today and that will continue. Rabbi Weisbrot has been a strong supporter of both amendments since the beginning and has guided us to materials produced by the URJ describing how other Reform congregations in the country have created space at the table for non-Jews to serve on synagogue boards. The current board approved the concept at its early November meeting, and at a meeting of committee and team chairs in late November discussion led to their approval to move forward with a Special Congregational Meeting.

B'nai Sholom will hold a Special Congregational Meeting on Tuesday, January 30, at 7 PM via Zoom to discuss and vote on these two draft amendments. Please mark your calendar and if possible, join us via Zoom. Look for more information via email or regular mail.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Nominating Committee: Barbara Devore, chair; Julie Friedman; Gail Golderman; Libby Liebschutz; Ann Lowenfels; Ben Marvin; and Valerie Tabak.

Hanukkah Candles Spread Light to our Homes

What started as a way of fighting the isolation of COVID has now become a festive tradition allowing B'nai Sholom congregants to gather and share their time-honored traditions while lighting the menorah on Zoom. This year we started with Dave Ray explaining the Yiddish origin of the song "Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah." Saturday found Ry and Sasha Suraski hosting a "Hanukkah Mad Libs" event. On Sunday, Roy and Judy Fruiterman shared a video of Pink Martini singing "Ocho Kandelikas." Other participants included Sam Fein talking about making his menorah as a bar mitzvah, Bettina and Howie Stoller discussing Jewish historic resistance and modern security, Liz Davis reading *The Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming* and Rondi Brower encouraging each participant to relate a fond Hanukkah memory. Each volunteer leader lit Hanukkah candles, said the blessings and provided a short talk, story or song that emphasized their personal connection to the holiday.

Consider joining us next year as a volunteer for the candle-lighting, or even just as a participant/onlooker. Seeing each other during this Festival of Lights is certainly a good way to brighten up the dark winter evenings!

Wanted: Joyful Noise for Shabbat Shirah

Calling All Musicians!! Shabbat Shirah is Friday, January 26. Come one, come all with your instruments (vocal and otherwise) to make some joyful noise. We'll recall the Parting of the Sea with lovely and entertaining music. Last year, we had congregant musicianship adding a special flavor to almost every prayer in the service. Please contact Melissa Putterman Hoffmann if you are interested at mputtermanhoffmann@gmail.com.

New on Our Website: The DONATE Button

Did you know there's a great new way to donate to B'nai Sholom? It's the DONATE button on the website. This is a safe alternative to sending checks through the mail, and you can use this button for all your donations, including but not limited to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund, Endowment Fund, Social Action Fund and tributes. We're excited to offer this alternative and hope you explore it and the new website at <https://www.bnaisholomalbany.org>.

What Is Tu BiShvat? This Year, a Mitzvah Opportunity!

From TORAH.org series of lessons by Rabbi Yehudah Prero and an article written by Eric Simon based on a conversation with Rabbi Dov Lipman

Tu BiShvat is literally a date...the 15th of the month of Shevat and in modern times is referred to as "the new year for trees." Historically, scholars disagree on the date and the spelling of the holiday.

What is agreed upon is that Tu BiShvat is one of several "new years" in the Jewish calendar. We are all familiar with Rosh Hashanah, which is the new year for the calendar. There are also new years for animals and for kings/rulers. This is not unlike the various "years" we observe today: a new calendar year, school year, fiscal year.

But why a new year for trees? In Jewish writings, there is reference to fruit trees and that the fruit of the trees could not be harvested and eaten until the tree was three years old. But how to measure the age of the trees? Therefore, a date was declared at the end of the rainy season in Israel as the "new year for trees" and a propitious time to plant new trees.

So now the question becomes: what is it about the 15th of Shevat and trees that should relate to us?

Trees are often a metaphor for Torah, as it is said in Proverbs 3:18, "It is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it." There are also Torah verses that imply that man is a tree and capable of bearing fruit, as referenced by Deuteronomy 20:19, which reads: "When you lay siege to a city for many days to capture it by making war against it, you shall not destroy its tree, wielding an axe against it; for you shall eat of it but not cut it down; for man is a tree of the field..." Others consider the fruit of one's "tree" as the mitzvahs that we do.

You can increase your personal crop of "mitzvah fruit" this month by adding the mitzvah of "feeding the hungry." Here's how:

- ✓ Contribute to the Free Food Fridge Fund at B'nai Sholom so that we can continue to fill three refrigerators in Albany with fresh fruits and vegetables every other month.
- ✓ Purchase cans of fruit and vegetables for your local food pantry (most towns have one) or bring them to the collection box at B'nai Sholom.

Caring Community: Helping to Help Each Other

When a congregant is experiencing a time of stress such as an illness, a death in the family or a new baby, B'nai Sholom's Caring Community offers a helping hand.

But the Caring Community can't do that without you.

We need congregants to sign up for the "on call" list to cook, to drive a fellow congregant to a medical appointment or to attend a minyan during shiva. Signing up does not mean you have to do it when it is not convenient. It means we can call and ask.

If you are willing to help in times of need, please contact Nancy Maurer by email: nancymaurer5@gmail.com

Don't delay, reach out today.

"On three things does the world stand: On Torah, on worship and on deeds of lovingkindness." Pirkei Avot 1:2

Help Fight Climate Change

The Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism in New York (RAC-NY) is campaigning for effective state laws on climate change. Join us to contact state legislators and ask for a meeting as a group, either virtual or in person.

We will seek their support for the New York Heat Act, the Just Energy Transition Act and, if we have time, the Climate Change Superfund Act. If interested, contact Barry Pendergrass at bpenderg37@gmail.com. He has information on the RAC-NY priority bills and will help organize the meetings.

Do something about climate change and promote the RAC-NY at the same time. We need congregants from all local Assembly districts and especially congregants from Bethlehem who are in the new 107th Assembly District represented by Scott Bendett.

Be On Guard Against Email/Text Spoofing Scams

STAY ALERT! If you see a suspicious email or text message that claims to come from Rabbi Weisbrot or someone else at B'nai Sholom, double-check the email address or phone number of the sender – it may be a scam. When in doubt, ***do not click on any links or attachments*** and ***do not reply*** to the message. Send a fresh message to the correct address or number for the supposed sender or call them directly to confirm.

Synagogue Scholar Series Returns

Annual Book Talk by Martha Rozett – January 12, 2024 (after Shabbat service) "Behind Enemy Lines: The True Story of a French Jewish Spy in Nazi Germany"

by Marthe Cohn with Wendy Holden

For her 19th annual presentation, Martha Rozett will discuss *Behind Enemy Lines: The True Story of a French Jewish Spy in Nazi Germany*, published in 2002 and still in print. Marthe Cohn, a remarkable and courageous young French woman fluent in German, served as a spy for the French First Army in the final year of World War II. Slipping behind enemy lines disguised as a young German nurse seeking information about a fictional German fiancé, she gathered information from sympathetic or unwitting Germans and then rode her bicycle back across the border to report on troop movements to the French intelligence service.

Today, Cohn is an astounding 103 years old and the subject of a delightful 90-minute 2019 documentary called "Chichinette: The Accidental Spy." "Chichinette" ("little pain in the neck") was the nickname the French Army intelligence gave to their small, persistent, lively colleague.

Martha's always-popular talk will take place after the evening's Kabbalat Shabbat service.

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Synagogue Scholar Talk by Mary Warrenner – Sunday, February 25, 10:30 AM "Cut Off: Shylock, Antisemitism, Value and Irony in 'The Merchant of Venice'"

Perhaps the most frequently asked question about Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is whether it is an antisemitic play or a play about antisemitism. Maybe it's both. In this comedy with the soul of a tragedy, all truths are questions and all insights ironic. As many commentators have pointed out, antisemitism is also a series of contradictions, but the only truth they seem to yield is the truth of antisemitism itself, the oldest and most durable hatred. The resurgence of this hatred has been in evidence since the beginning of the 21st century, but it is clearly escalating. Is it possible that a play first produced over 400 years ago can shed some light on this hatred, on the fears we are facing now, even if the only moral clarity it offers is a better understanding of who we are and what we value?

Mary is a professor at SUNY Orange Community College, where she taught the college's Shakespeare course for 23 years, as well as other literature, writing and philosophy courses. Over the years, Mary has given many presentations and led discussions on a number of Shakespeare plays, including *The Merchant of Venice*.

Onegs Are Back in Full Swing! Want to Host One?

Do you have a wedding anniversary, birthday or yahrtzeit to honor? Hosting an Oneg is one way to share your joy or remembrance with your friends in the B'nai Sholom community. Hosting is simple: provide food and beverages that the community can share after Shabbat services while everyone socializes. If you have an upcoming event to celebrate, or a loved one to honor in a special way, please sign up online to host an Oneg at our SignUpGenius site using the link found in the Weekly E-announcements. You will be able to check the dates for which hosts are needed. If there are open dates, the committee will reach out to congregants to inquire about hosting. If you have any questions or need the sign-up link sent to you, please contact Laura Kaplan at lckaplan79@gmail.com.

A FEW MINUTES WITH THE TORAH

Spotlighting the outstanding d'vrei Torah written and delivered by congregants. Melissa Putterman Hoffmann shared some thoughts with us at the Nov. 17 Kabbalat Shabbat service.

Tol'dot, by Melissa Putterman Hoffmann

This week's parshah is Tol'dot, Hebrew for generations or descendants. Despite its dry title, this is one of the great stories in Genesis. And if you ask me, it's about COMPETITION.

Sarah has passed. Abraham has passed. We might expect this week's portion to turn its focus to Isaac (you remember - the son who trudged all the way up the mountain with his father, without knowing he was the planned sacrifice), but instead we move to Isaac's children, with Isaac becoming the link between Abraham and Jacob. There are twins who could not be more different, and parent preferences: the father for hairy Esau, the huntsman, the mother for Jacob, momma's helper in the kitchen. There are continuing instances of deception and karma(!). For example, previously seen in Genesis, Abraham passes his wife off as his sister in order to protect himself - a ruse that allows other men to treat her as a conquest; this week, Abraham's son, Jacob, joins his mother in a scheme to cheat his brother, Esau, out of a birthright; later, Jacob will be duped into marrying the wrong sister. And in old age, Jacob will be fooled by his sons into thinking that his favorite son, Joseph, is dead.

Good times.

There is also a prophetic explanation for the tumult inside Rebekkah's womb when she is pregnant. Two children who will someday become two nations are pressing against each other inside her womb and will remain in perpetual competition until one prevails over the other.

Competition and the strategies for coming out ahead don't often bring out admirable behavior in the Torah. Tonight I'd like to summarize and comment on an essay by Rabbi Dr.

Nachum Amsel entitled "Competition in Jewish Thought." The essay appears in the book, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*.

Even before people were created, the Torah already alludes to competition: on the Fourth Day of Creation ... there was competition between the sun and the moon for dominance of the world. They contended about which would provide more light for the earth. Since there cannot be two equal rulers and "winners" in this competition, Rashi says that the moon was made smaller and "moved" to the night. G-d even "compensated" the moon for this and gave it the stars. The moon did not want to obey G-d and become smaller, claiming that "it is not fair." G-d admitted to the moon that its claim was legitimate and, as "compensation" for its diminishment (and losing the "competition"), declared that a special sacrifice would be brought at the beginning of each lunar month (Rosh Chodesh) to honor/placate the moon for its reduction in size.

So we see different responses to competition: giving voice to feelings of unfairness, acknowledging those feelings, compensation through gifts (stars) and honoring the loser in perpetuity (sacrifice).

Back to the essay: The role of the Serpent in the Garden, competing with G-d's directive and convincing Eve to choose the apple; Cain and Abel with a rivalry so intense that one killed the other in order to garner the most affection and approval from G-d; the competition between the tribes in Israel, which forced Moses to conduct a lottery so that the competition would be minimized and the appointment of judges would seem equitable to all.

Again, we see additional outcomes or responses to competition: punishment, banishment (for eating the apple), murder to get what one wants, a lottery that leaves the winner to chance rather than leaving a leader to decide who wins.

The essay has this to say about the competition over birthright and blessing in this week's portion: in Isaac blessing Jacob when he may have actually discerned that it was Jacob he was blessing rather than his older brother, Esau, a very interesting truth emerges. In each story in the Torah, Judaism is clearly teaching us that blood lines and predetermination do not decide the winner of the competition in advance. The competition is always fair (hopefully) and the more deserving competitor is victorious.

Amsel leaves us with questions (what d'var Torah doesn't?). Are Jews supposed to quash all of their natural feelings to compete, or are they supposed to channel these feelings to something more positive? Is it possible to compete and still have feelings of compassion without jealousy toward others? If people can attain peace with others, should they still feel guilty about desiring to compete? End of essay summary.

May we in our work and play recognize the times for healthy competition. May we discover other lenses through which feelings of rivalry can be understood and resolved. And may we come through losses to competitors or competing circumstances intact, knowing that we remain in possession of our *nefesh*, *neshama* and *ruah* - our soul and spirit - and *lev tahor* - pure heart.

Shabbat shalom!

Our Recent Kibbutzniks

Howard and Marcus Domfort

In memory of Sam Goldman, World War II Veteran, who lived to 100

Thank You!

...to the fantastic Bulletin Brigade who fold and stuff the monthly Bulletins: Jim and Joan Savitt, Martha Rozett, Martie Teumim; Rema Goldstein, Anita Stein, Barbara Devore, Joe DeFronzo, Amy Sternstein, Deb Adler and Cheryl and Mark Reeder.

...to the following congregants who recently hosted an oneg Shabbat or kiddush lunch: Cheryl and Mark Reeder & Judy and Roy Fruiterman, Margaret and Valerie Tabak, Susan Radosh, Anne Hausgaard.

...to everyone who has given so much of their time to meet with the office manager to learn some of her responsibilities so the transition will be a smooth one.

The following Yahrtzeits will be observed in January:

1/5 Anita Dubb*; Arnold Rosenberg*; Roberta Minzer; Mildred Adler*; Olaf "Sonny" Hausgaard; Lore (Laurie) Lee; Rachel Trombley Porter; Benjamin Sacks; Irving Goodman*; Herbert Swift

1/12 Michael Leon Kramer*; Vera Winston Propp*; Gerald Davis; Jean Pacuk; Joseph Velk*; Frederick V. Cassirer, Sr.; Walter L., Jr Hock; Eleanor Marvin; Kitty Lazoroff*; Sylvia Brownstein; Mortimer Henry Englander; Avraham Koren*

1/19 Minnie Edel*; Martin Loeb*; Tobey Katz; Theron Vosburgh; Leo Cabelly

1/26 Rena Bach*; Harold M. Smuckler*; Bertha Friedman; Marian Hock*; William Smith; Miriam Miller; Bernard Smith; Max Fiks*; Aaron David Stoller*

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

The Congregation Notes with Thanks These Contributions:

General Fund

In memory of **Gerald Davis** by Eleanor and Randy Davis

In memory of **Alfred Waxman** by Linda Finkle

In appreciation of **Mari Vosburgh** by Becky and Ben Marvin

Yom Kippur Break-Fast

Mitchell and Doris Levinn

Ben Marvin

Social Action/Social Justice Committee – Free Food Fridges Fund

Laurie Shanks and Terence Kindlon

Mary Warrener and Melissa Browne

Eleanor and Randy Davis

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

Mary Warrener and Melissa Browne

RABBI: Danielle Weisbrot can be reached at rabbi@banisholomalbany.org

RABBI EMERITUS: Donald P. Cashman

PRESIDENT: Ann Lowenfels can be reached at annlowenfels@gmail.com

OFFICE MANAGER: office@bnaisholomalbany.org

OFFICE HOURS: TUE/WED/THURS/FRI 9:30 AM–4:00 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

February
March

Deadline

January 11
February 8