



# HA-KESHER

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Newsletter of Or Hadash  
A Reconstructionist Congregation  
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## From Rabbi Josh



In the story of the Burning Bush which we are exploring as a congregation this year through the Transformative Text project, God famously appears to Moses and says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," (Exodus 3:6) and then commands him to go to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves. Rarely are moments of awareness that we are standing in God's presence – and what those moments demand from us – as unambiguous as this passage when Moses stands in the desert before a bush that burns and is not consumed. In the Bible, we regularly read of miracles occurring and of God speaking to our ancestors, but in our own lives we see no such obvious miracles and we experience God's call, if at all, in "the small, still voice" which the prophet Elijah describes. (1 Kings 19:12) Often we might experience God in our lives more as an absence than as a presence – if, in fact, we think about God at all.

Yet every once in a while it can happen to us, catching us by surprise and nearly knocking us off our feet: a sense of existing in relationship to something infinitely transcendent, a sense of radical awe and wonder that reorients us toward a reality larger than the one we usually inhabit, a sense of standing in God's presence. It might be at a significant moment in our lives, like at the birth of a child or the death of a parent. It might be in an especially beautiful place, like looking over the high mountains or watching the sunset at a beach. It might be in the connection we feel with someone whom we love deeply and with whom we can share our most intimate and vulnerable selves. Or it might be in some otherwise ordinary moment that we suddenly realize is anything but because, like each and every moment, it is grounded in and suffused with the extraordinary. Whatever that moment is for us, most of us have times – fleeting and elusive though they may be – of standing in relation to something larger than ourselves, something that we might choose to call "God."

Over the coming months, we will be exploring this dimension of our religious lives through a number of programs and presentations designed to encourage us to consider what it means to stand in God's presence. Starting on December 2, I will be leading a three-part class on opening ourselves to the wisdom and insights of the Jewish mystical tradition through kabbalistic teachings on the Hebrew alphabet. In February, Dr. Simcha Paull Raphael will provide an introductory survey to Jewish mystical thought and in March we are delighted to welcome Professor Arthur Green to Or Hadash as our 2013 Dickstein Scholar in Residence. We are continuing our exploration of the Burning Bush through the Transformative Text program with Rabbi Erin Hirsh, and I am introducing a new service called "Shabbat ha-Lev." Literally "Shabbat of the Heart," these will be Friday evening services devoted to reflection and contemplation that draw on both Jewish and Eastern meditation traditions (no previous meditation experience necessary). I hope you will take advantage of these opportunities to deepen both your knowledge and understanding of Jewish mysticism and your cultivation of an awareness of the transcendent in all our lives.

B'shalom,

*Rabbi Josh*

- Sunday, December 2, 9, and 16 at 11:30 AM – Rabbi Josh's series, "The Mystical Aleph-Bet"
- Friday, January 18 and March 8 at 8:00 PM – Shabbat ha-Lev
- Sunday, January 20 at 11:30 AM – Second adult installment of the Transformative Text program with Rabbi Erin Hirsh
- Sunday, February 3 at 11:00 AM – Dr. Simcha Paull Raphael's overview of Jewish mystical thought
- Friday, March 15-Saturday, March 16 – 2013 Dickstein Scholar in Residence Dr. Arthur Green

## President's Message

By Lani Moss

I had the great honor and privilege of speaking to the congregation twice over the High Holydays. Once as the President and the second time, I “changed kippot” and spoke to you about the Campaign to Renew and Sustain Or Hadash, along with our new Gift of the Hand Campaign. The foundation and framework of both of these talks was remarkably the same, and one you have heard in the past. I spoke a great deal about community and referred to Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan’s emphasis on **belonging**. As a Reconstructionist, I believe that Kaplan, the intellectual founder of our movement, writes and teaches the “Torah” that guides us in our congregational life. Kaplan states that in order to have a successful congregation, there must be committed and involved members of the community. Members need to feel that they are part of something greater than themselves. The congregation can begin by bringing them into an environment where they can make a place for themselves. We aim to engage our members on different intellectual and social levels; the aim is to first engage them in this community and to bring them to a point where they feel a sense of commitment to it.

The leadership of our congregation often wrestles with the question of how we convince others of the value of belonging to our community. This question is expanded to include consideration of communicating the value of belonging to those who are already members but question the necessity of remaining within the community. **I think that many of us find that our community has so much more to offer than what we were initially seeking, and that membership in Or Hadash can pay us back dividends – dividends that are immeasurable in enriching our lives.** For instance, can you put a price on having someone feed you when you are ill; hold you when you experience a loss; celebrate with you at a time of joy; or pray with you on Shabbat or the High Holidays? So many of the benefits of membership are intangible, but I would suggest that these intangibles are the glue that holds our community together.

In addition to relying on Kaplan for guidance, we always look to our tradition and sources to inform the work we do in governing the community. Even if many of the benefits that we see from our membership are intangible, we need to strengthen and support the tangible elements that enrich our community – our beautiful building, our professional staff, our Rabbi, and our school. The Torah tells us that Moses instructed each of the people to bring a *nadiv lev* or gift of the heart for the building of the

Mishkan or tabernacle in the desert. We learn that the Mishkan is meant to be a dwelling place for God in the midst of the people so that they can have a tangible reminder that God is with them. When Moses instructs the people concerning the giving of gifts for the sanctuary, the text **explicitly states** that he is speaking to the whole Israelite community. It gives everyone an equal opportunity to donate to the building of the place where godliness is to dwell in their midst.

As I write this message, your generosity has enabled us to surpass the halfway point in the Campaign to Renew and Sustain Or Hadash. We are still striving to reach participation in the campaign by 100% of the community – and, of course, to reach our financial goal. As the end of the calendar year is approaching, I urge each and every one of you to make a gift to the campaign.

In addition, please make a Gift of the Hand. This “gift” is made by checking off some of the items on the list of “gifts” that each of you can give to your fellow members of the congregation. These will be gifts of your time, your energy, your involvement in things large and small, and will deepen your sense of belonging to our community. The list came to each of you in the same envelope as the annual appeal letter. Please feel free to contact the synagogue office if these materials found their way to the bottom of your files and you would like another.

Both gifts will pay you dividends that will enrich your life and the life of our precious community.

### MAZEL TOV

To **Susan and Stuart Rosenthal** on the birth of their first grandson, Skyler Rosenthal.

To **Louise and Giuseppe DeSimone** on the birth of their grandson, Micah DeSimone Wilcox.

To **Barbara Altman** on the birth of her great-grandson, Asher Bernard Ginsburg.

To **Jill and Jim Marmion** on their 25th wedding anniversary. They celebrated by cycling through Tuscany.

To **Eli Kravinsky**, son of **Emily and Zell Kravinsky**, on becoming a Bar Mitzvah on Saturday, December 15, 2012.

## From the Education Director

By Barbara Weisman

Our school year is well under way, and my first few months as Education Director here at Or Hadash have been truly wonderful. I'm feeling quite at home now, having settled into a comfortable routine, and knowing just about every student's name.

The year got off to a wonderful start with our 7th grade Shabbaton with Kehillat Hanahar. Shortly into our program, you could not tell which class was which, as our students blended so beautifully together, sharing many common bonds and obviously happy to be in each other's company. By the end of the Shabbaton, the teens begged Rabbi Michelle and me to create another opportunity for them to get together. And we certainly will! Clearly, this event was a great success!

Our high school students kicked off their year with a visit to the Plains Mennonite Church and blended Jewish traditions with the Mennonite prayer service. Students were asked to share reflections of their B'nai Mitzvah experiences and show off their tallitot. It was a warm and rich learning experience as the best of both cultures were exchanged.

Our teens also visited the Cradles to Crayons warehouse as a Shabbat mitzvah outing. We sorted through clothing, toys and shoes that would find their way into a needy child's hands to give them self-respect and confidence. It was an experience not to be missed.

The fall TEL retreat at Camp JRF provided the opportunity for our students to join other Reconstructionist teens from Boston down to and including the DC/Virginia areas. They had a wonderful time bonding, learning, praying, eating, and having fun. They came away with an invitation to join Temple Beth El of Newark, DE for a program in March. So our teens are creating ties to their fellow Reconstructionist counterparts all around; and making connections with other youngsters is an important goal that I have for our students.

Speaking of making connections in the Reconstructionist movement, Lori Rubin has been instrumental in organizing the RENA (Reconstructionist Educators of North America) conference that began on Wednesday, November 14th at Or Hadash with additional activities and meetings for educators through Friday morning at various locations within our community. Lori and I joined our fellow Reconstructionist educators to share ideas and deepen connections. I am proud to have recently joined this organization and look forward to assuming a role there.

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***Margery Hesney, Director***

Other highlights of our year have included High Holiday programming, Family Education for our GAN and 6th graders, Camp Shabbat and a trip to the National Museum of Jewish American History to take part in the Yitzchak Rabin Memorial Program. Our students have been taking part in meaningful services with several unique experiential highlights. For example, an extremely memorable one was in creating a tent much like our ancestors Abraham and Sarah might have lived in. Students experienced Mah Tovv first-hand as we sat in that tent, drank water, washed our hands, and discussed what it is to welcome people into our "tent" or community as we do when we pray Mah Tovv.

We kicked off our yearlong study of the text of the burning bush called our Transformative Text program. On October 14th families participated in a variety of engaging experiences to connect them to this key text in a deep and meaningful way. This was continued on the Global Day of Jewish Learning on November 18th.

We continue to explore and work towards tikkun olam in the area of food insecurity and food justice by collecting food items to give to families in need in our community. In addition, we will continue to partner with the Or Hadash SATO Committee to learn more about these crucial issues and what we can do to help alleviate suffering. And so, we look forward to more experiences that heighten our connection to Judaism. It's what our school is all about.

## From the Program Coordinator

*By Lori Rubin*

This is my first article written as the Program Coordinator; and in this position, I have learned a great deal about our community. I always knew that Or Hadash was a special place filled with special people, but it wasn't until I sat down during High Holiday services as a congregant that I especially felt the love and joy of being part of a caring community. As I looked around at all of the faces present during those services, I was reminded that I had built precious relationships with so many of you, and I felt totally at peace. These relationships continue to serve me well in my new role as Program Coordinator.

Our first two program initiatives were quite successful. Our Welcome-Back BBQ boasted over 200 participants from all facets of our congregation. During Sukkot, we were blessed with over 60 people celebrating the end of Shabbat with Havdalah on Saturday Night in the Sukkah. As I write this article, the RSVPs for Shabbat Schmooze keep rolling in! Next up will be Social Action Havdalah on Saturday, December 1st, when we will focus on hunger as an issue and, in an experiential way, will delve into how to help those in need of food as we enter the winter months.

My roles and responsibilities at Or Hadash and at Jewish Learning Venture overlap. I am Program Director of Family Engagement at Jewish Learning Venture for Chester, Delaware, and Bucks County, as well as Lower Merion. In this role, I meet families in public spaces to celebrate holidays, hear a Jewish story, participate in a social action project, learn a Jewish value, etc. My job is to take families a step further in their Jewish Journey regardless of whether or not they belong to a congregation.

Similarly, at Or Hadash, my role is to engage families within the congregation and beyond. What is especially intriguing to me is the idea of building relationships. After all, people cannot take a step further into their Jewish Journey if they don't trust those they meet along the way. I meet people in public spaces in my "day" job so that their entry point is comfortable. At Or Hadash, I have learned to ask many questions, knowing that people want to connect in the way that is easiest for them. So being on a committee isn't what floats everyone's boat. Going to services doesn't speak to everyone. However, every member of Or Hadash has something to offer. It may take a while to get to know what that is, but everyone can connect in a meaningful way. For some, it might be bartending or grilling. For others, it might be making centerpieces or creating a flyer. I hope that, over the course of the year, I discover

what will keep you connected. I am happy to talk by phone or meet for coffee. I am very excited about creating new Havurot, social groups around subjects or interests that are important for you. In the next few months, we will be exploring an Outdoors Havurah for those who enjoy hiking, biking, and canoeing. Another event that might interest you is a show at Act II in Ambler. In January, we will be hosting an organic night in honor of Tu B'Shevat. What interests you? Let me know by e-mail at [program@orhadash.com](mailto:program@orhadash.com), by phone at 215-407-0992, or on our Facebook page! I look forward to meeting you where you are and taking you one step further in your Jewish Journey at Or Hadash.

## CONDOLENCES

- We mourn the passing of our congregant, **Ed Kashdan**, and send condolences to his sons **Zachary and Daniel Kashdan**
- To **Deborah Lamb** on the passing of her father, George Lamb, father-in-law of Robert Klotz and grandfather of Lilli, Adam and Natalie Klotz
- To **Marty Jacobs** on the passing of his mother, Tobi Weissman, mother-in-law of Irene and grandmother of Sharon and Lisa
- To **Jill Harris** on the passing of her father, Marvin Steinberg, father-in-law of Jim, grandfather of Brett and Nicole
- To **Steve Gewirtzman** on the passing of his father, David Gewirtzman, father-in-law of Amy, grandfather of Jonathan, Adina, and Naomi
- To **Amy Grossman** on the passing of her father, William Plotnick, father-in-law of Marc, grandfather of Rachel, Sam, and Sarah of blessed memory
- To **Lisa Gladish** on the passing of her grandmother, Donnie Cahn, grandmother-in-law of Jake, and great-grandmother of Noah and Adam
- To **Barry Davis** on the passing of his father, Wesley Davis, father-in-law of Ann, grandfather of Craig and Meredith
- To **Liz Grossman** on the passing her father, Martin Shames, father-in-law of Larry, grandfather of Abby and Noah

## From the Administrator

By Laurie Albert

Hurricane Sandy affected many of us in different ways. I am pleased to report that Or Hadash's beautiful building did not sustain any damage, and while we did lose some branches on the property and the contents of the refrigerator, nothing required serious repairs.

But I am most gratified to see the response of our congregation. A number of you called in to make sure we were undamaged and to ask if you could help. Our wonderful president, Lani Moss, extended an invitation to all congregants without power to come and get warm and recharge their electronic devices if needed. Many of you called to check on the staff. Thank you for your compassion and concern.

Again, I feel blessed to be part of such a caring community.

**Or Hadash has been the recipient of many gifts from our congregants, for which we are grateful. However, we are requesting that all donations of treasured items such as books, tapes, videos and other Judaica be placed on hold. We appreciate your cooperation at this time.**

Three Part Harmony with Tot Shabbat at 6 pm, dairy/vegetarian Pot Luck dinner (please RSVP to office@orhadash.com for the dinner) at 6:30 and Intergenerational Family Service at 7:00 will be held on:

- **December 7th** marking Global Hunger Shabbat and celebrating all December birthdays.
- **January 4th** with Shabbat in your PJs and celebrating all January birthdays.
- **February 1st** celebrating all February birthdays.

**Saturday evening, December 1st at 7:30 pm.** - Social Action Coffee House

**Sunday, December 2nd at 9 am** – Nosh with Rabbi Josh. Come for coffee and conversation. The next Nosh will be on **Sunday, January 27th.**

**December 2, 9 and 16 at 11:30** - The Mystical Hebrew Aleph Bet: Rabbi Josh's three-part Adult Education Program

Please RSVP to office@orhadash.com.

**Monday, December 10th at 7:30** – Or Hadash Book Club

Contact Susan and Stuart Rosenthal at ssrosenthal@verizon.net for details.

## UPCOMING EVENTS



**Saturday, December 8th** - First Night of Chanukah

Join us for a special Hannukah Shabbat on **Friday, December 14th** with a dinner at 6 pm and service with choir at 7:30.

**Friday, December 21st at 8:00** - A special "Winter Solstice" Shabbat musical service

**Wednesday, January 9th at 7 pm** – Healing Service

**Friday, January 11th** - Shabbat Schmooze

**Sunday, January 13th from 8:30 am – 2:30 pm** – Red Cross Blood Drive

Please help save a life! Contact Jon Shapiro (jshapmd@yahoo.com) to make an appointment or to volunteer to help.

**Saturday, February 23rd** - Purim Celebration

Festivities start at 6 pm. In addition, we will be participating in the Bux-Mont Kehillah Carnival on **Sunday, February 24th.**

**Introductory Torah Study** is taught one Saturday morning a month by RRC student, Anne Feibelman. These open-ended discussions require no background, Hebrew knowledge, or preparation. Come with your questions and your interest in learning from Judaism's most sacred text. All classes meet from 9-10 AM in Rabbi Josh's study, followed by Shabbat morning services. Contact Anne at feibelman@gmail.com

Saturday, December 1

Saturday, January 19

Saturday, February 9

Saturday, March 9

Saturday, April 20

## SOCIAL ACTION – TIKKUN OLAM UPDATE

### 2012-2013 Focus on Food Insecurity and Hunger Reduction

*By Debbie Bernstein & Alisa Belzer, Co-Chairs, SATO*

SATO is continuing to organize activities around our yearlong theme of learning about food insecurity and working toward hunger reduction.

We have been busy this fall with hunger reduction. During the high holidays we collected approximately 240 jars of peanut butter to donate to the Mitzvah Pantry. In October we made about 140 meals for Aid for Friends. In November we provided daily meals, as well as transportation, overnight supervision, laundry, and shopping for families in transition through Interfaith Hospitality Network. In January we will continue our tradition of making soup for MLK Day to donate again to Aid for Friends. Containers will be available in the community room starting in December. Watch for details on this in the weekly OH news blast.

In November, we began activities related to learning more about food insecurity. On November 16th, Ruth Laibson from Jewish Social Policy Action Network spoke at Shabbat services about Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger, a national nonprofit organization working to educate about hunger issues and to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States. Our Social Action Havdalah on December 1st at 7:30 pm will be part social (come and schmooze) and part action as we learn about and launch the Food Stamp Challenge. Designed to educate participants about the challenges of living on \$5 a day (the average food stamp benefit), this experiential and educational activity lasts one week and is great for families and empty nesters to raise awareness and sensitivity about the difficulties of living with less. The Food Stamp Challenge will conclude on December 7th, 7 pm at Global Hunger Shabbat, an intergenerational service during which we will share our experiences.

Please contact SATO co-chairs Alisa Belzer, [alisa.belzer@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:alisa.belzer@gse.rutgers.edu) or Debbie Bernstein, [debbie.bernstein@mac.com](mailto:debbie.bernstein@mac.com) if you can help organize these events or would like more information.

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### Interfaith Hospitality Thank You

This November, we worked with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, and two other area congregations, to provide a warm and welcoming shelter for two families. While the families stayed at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, our numerous volunteers provided food, transportation and company, and ensured the families felt welcomed and safe!

We thank our coordinators who scheduled and rescheduled all of our volunteers: Debbie Blum, Jennifer Hoagland, Shelley Sanders, and Rabbi Vivian Schirn. We also join our coordinators in thanking each and every one of our volunteers for your kindness and generosity of time and resources! None of this could happen without each volunteer's time, talents and energy so that our community as a whole could provide a welcoming space for these families in need. The families will flourish because of our work. That is a mitzvah! Thank you.

Debbie Bernstein & Alisa Belzer, Co-Chairs, SATO

## MUSSAR

By Marty Jacobs, *Spiritual Life Committee Chair*

Mussar literally means correction or instruction in Hebrew, but it has come to refer to a system of Jewish moral and ethical education. Fortunately, all of us at Or Hadash now have an opportunity for in-depth participation in Mussar. I'll talk more about that later, but for now I'd like to explain Mussar in more detail.

Mussar began as a 19th century reaction against what was perceived as rote observance of Jewish law, which was leading to loss of emotional connection to the tradition's inner meaning and ethical core. The movement's founder, Rav Yisrael Salanter, started a yeshiva in Vilna, Lithuania, where he emphasized moral teachings based on classical Mussar literature. Even though Mussar teachings had been available for several hundred years prior to Salanter, they were only practiced on an individual basis. Rav Salanter, however, made the teachings available on a much broader scale, due to the movement's rapidly growing popularity in Eastern Europe.

Although Mussar was originally opposed by large segments of the Orthodox Jewish community, there has been a significant revival of Mussar among both Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews. One of the leaders of this revival is Rabbi Ira Stone, the rabbi of Beth Zion-Beth Israel in center city, where he founded and directs Mussar Leadership. Rabbi Stone is also a faculty member at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where he teaches Mussar. In Rabbi Stone's book, *A Responsible Life*, he describes one of the key questions addressed by Mussar: **"In a cultural milieu in which personal satisfaction and spiritual satisfaction are deemed synonymous, can we hope to attain an alternate spirituality that promises to take us beyond ourselves not through intoxication, but through profound concern for the other people among whom we live?"** This summarizes the guiding principles of Mussar. In addition, the practice of Mussar is based on a series of personal characteristics called *middot* (singular *middah*). Examples of *middot* are equanimity, patience, orderliness, humility, righteousness, truthfulness, calmness, trust, and generosity. Each *middah* is accompanied by detailed written materials, which aid in carrying out its teachings. The goal is for a person to replace (at least partially) self-centered habits with those, which focus on the needs of others.

I spoke earlier about an opportunity to study *Mussar*. For several years, a group of five of us has been meeting every Wednesday night for two hours at Or Hadash to

(continued on page 8)

## BIMAH MITZVAH BASKETS

Wonderful news! Thanks to your participation, the Bimah Mitzvah Basket project has donated more than \$1000 annually to the Mitzvah Food Project, which alleviates hunger and malnutrition among at-risk families in the Greater Philadelphia region. You, too, can donate and mark your child's BAR/BAT MITZVAH or other life-cycle event by using our festive BIMAH MITZVAH BASKETS.

The baskets are available in two sizes: medium for \$90 and large for \$118. There is a wide assortment of decorative colored bows. Special color orders are available for a nominal charge. For more information and to reserve your baskets, contact Rhoda Gansler at [rgansler@verizon.net](mailto:rgansler@verizon.net) or 215-412-8790.



**MUSSAR** (continued from page 7)

study with Mindy Shapiro, who is a student of Rabbi Stone's and a staff member at Mussar Leadership. We focus on readings from the classical Mussar text *Mesillat Yesharim* (The Path of the Upright) that presents the teachings of Mussar, as well as discussing our own experiences during the week using a workbook developed by Mussar Leadership. The participants also meet in groups of two or three (*hevruta*) for one hour each week to study the material one-on-one, and some individual reading review is expected between sessions. In addition, a new *middah* is added every two weeks to develop our personal *Mussar* practices.

Mindy Shapiro would like to start a second weekly group, for beginning students, starting in January and continuing through mid-May. It will be open to all Or Hadash members as well as the general community. Anyone interested in joining this group, or in just learning more about Mussar, is encouraged to attend the Taste of Mussar workshop on Wednesday, December 19 at 7:30 P.M. at Or Hadash. The workshop will be led by Mindy, with participation by the current group members. Please contact Mindy at [mindysue39@gmail.com](mailto:mindysue39@gmail.com) if you are interested in attending this workshop or want more information.

The Or Hadash Mussar group has been a life-changing experience for those of us who have been part of it. We all find the program to be very worthwhile and recommend it highly. If you have any questions about Mussar or this class, please email me at [martin.jacobs@verizon.net](mailto:martin.jacobs@verizon.net).

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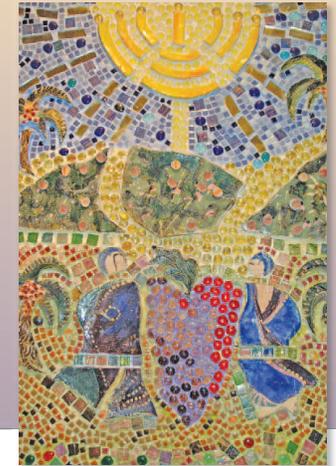


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