

KOL HALEV



קול הלב

KOL HALEV is an affiliate of JRF

July - August 2011

Kol HaLev Havurah News:

Six months into this new year, **Sara Norris**, 2011-2012 Kol HaLev Chair, and Board members, **Jeff Meyer**, Treasurer, **Evelyn Brass**, Secretary, and **Phyllis Schatz** and **Rona Lesser**, Members-at-large, are keeping the havurah vibrant with exciting programs as well as with Shabbat services and Shabbatononim. **Rabbi Alexis Pearce** returns to Kol HaLev for a third year and High Holiday planning is already underway.

Rabbi Pearce will visit us on July 8th and 9th for a Shabbaton. The challenging themes are “What it means to be blessed” and “What does G-d require of us?” On Sunday, July 10th **Rabbi Pearce**, **Marcia Sterling** (returning as cantorial soloist) and the Observances Committee begin preparing the liturgy for High Holidays.

The **Observances Committee** strives to bring exciting programs to the membership and the community. Thanks go to **Sondra Kaplan** and **Gail Kutin**, co-chairs, and to members, **Rona Lesser** (liaison to Board), **Jeff Meyer**, and **Gail Toland**.

Andrea Turner has agreed to be **Membership Chair** and the havurah has already welcomed two new members: **David Kahne** and **Judy Margolin**. Their bios and photos will appear in the next issue.

As agreed at the Annual Meeting in December 2010, an ad-hoc **Communications Committee** has been formed to handle outreach and in-reach. In addition to announcements, flyers and email monitoring, **Gail Kutin** writes articles about KHL events for submission to the Jewish Herald Voice; **Madeleine Boskovitz** chairs the committee and publishes the bi-monthly Newsletter. **Lisa Trimarchi** has brought the website up to date and is maintaining it. **Susan Waggoner** has agreed to serve as consultant with online marketing. **Madeleine** and **Gail** will look into local marketing as recommended by Rabbi Litman during her recent visit.

Madeleine Boskovitz, Newsletter Editor
Chair, Communications Committee

Message from Rabbi Alexis Pearce

July 9 Balak Numbers 22:2-25:9
July 16 Pinchas Numbers 25:10-30:1
July 23 Matot Numbers 30-2-32:42
July 30 Masei Numbers 33:1-36:13
August 6 Dvarim Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22
August 8 Erev Tisha B'Av
August 13 V'et'chanan Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

The saddest day on the Jewish calendar is Tisha B'Av, occurring this year on August 9. It is the time to grieve the destruction and of the ancient Temple, as well as many other times of sorrow faced by the Jewish people. It is a day of fasting, and the book of Lamentations is read.

The proximity of Tisha B'Av lends a bittersweet irony to the Torah portions read during July and August, describing the period on the eve of the conquest of the land. The people are admonished again and again that they must live in accordance with G-d's law if they want to stay in the land. We know, especially near Tisha B'Av, that the people will be evicted twice by conquerors. They will blame this on their sins, especially idolatry. We can ask ourselves, what is required to live in a place of holiness? What temptations lure our attention away?

Idolatry is not just worshiping idols in the false belief they are G-ds. Idolatry means putting something less than divine in the place of G-d in our hearts and minds, as the subject of our devotion. It can mean taking a good thing too far, or not taking an ideal seriously enough. Avoiding idolatry in this sense is a constant struggle, both for us and for our ancient forebears.

At the end of *Parshat Balak*, the Israelites become involved with idolatry and prostitution, enticed by Midianite women. G-d decrees that the instigators should be impaled, and a grandson of Aaron, the priest *Pinchas* (Egyptian for “black one”), personally spears an Israelite and his Midianite lover. Did he go too far?

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Toward the end of the Book of Numbers, G-d tells Moses to conduct a war of vengeance against Midian to punish them for seducing the Israelites into idolatry. Moses is angry when the women and children are spared, and decrees that only virgins and little girls may live; boys and women must be executed. We can ask ourselves, what is the price of our own straying from our principles? Failing our ideals? What innocents have suffered and how painful would it be to set things right?

V'et'chanan, the second portion in Deuteronomy, contains several passages well known from liturgy including the repetition of the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:6-18) The Israelites are repeatedly, emphatically warned against idolatry. Moses reminds us that everyone agreed to the covenant before G-d at Mt. Sinai. The people are urged to take over the land as G-d's chosen, showing no mercy, not intermarrying, and definitely not engaging in idolatry. (In fact Deuteronomy emphasizes the scourge of idolatry so much, it is almost proof in itself of how popular these practices must have been in ancient Israel.)

These injunctions to take over the land by force, wiping out other peoples and their religious practices at the command of G-d, are disturbing to us. (Didn't Moses marry a Midianite?) To hear G-d and Moses decreeing the killing of women and children is jarring:

“...you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land; you shall destroy all their figured objects; you shall destroy all their molten images, and you shall demolish all their cult places. And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land to you to possess....” (Num 33:52-3)

This is the kind of passage that leads a lot of people to reject religion altogether, because some of the texts, and some of the adherents, are extreme. Some Jewish fundamentalists believe such passages give them a divine right to the Promised Land today, and some even teach they have the right to kill the Arab inhabitants. But it isn't only Jews. There are Moslem fundamentalists who carry out acts of terror for the “glory of G-d” which

is really a desecration of Islam. There are Christian fundamentalists who want all the Jews gathered back to Zion for the Rapture, whether it promotes peace or not, so that Jesus will return as they think their scriptures indicate. Any religious text can be taken to extremes by extremists. Scripture itself can become an idol.

Living perhaps 4,000 years after the events described, most Reconstructionists understand the Torah as a foundational document, not perfect, and not the last word. We are heirs to a religious culture very different from the one Moses and Aaron knew, but which still seeks holiness and peace despite many sad and painful chapters in our history. The call of the *Shma* (in *V'et'Chan*, Deut 6:4-9) remains pure and clear: struggle to live as G-d demands and we may build a world that is a blessing. Soon, as the High Holy Days approach, it will be time to consider honestly what stops us from living up to this vision.

From the Observances Committee:

Members: Sondra Kaplan & Gail Kutin, chairs; Jeff Meyer, Rona Lesser (Liaison to Board), & Gail Toland.

News: The Observances Committee is at work planning events for the rest of the year including the High Holidays which begin in late September. The committee will be meeting with Rabbi Pearce and Marcia Sterling, who will return as cantorial soloist, on Sunday, July 10th to begin preparations.

Many thanks to all those who helped out in May & June 2011:

May 7th: Shabbat morning service and potluck dinner. Thank you to **Madeleine Boskovitz & Jeff Meyer** for leading, **Dorothy Robbins** for Torah reading and **Sondra Kaplan** for the d'var Torah.

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May 13th: Erev Shabbat service and potluck dinner. Thank you to **Jeanne Saletan** for hosting and **Sondra Kaplan** for leading the service.

June 4th: Shabbat morning service and potluck dinner. Thank you to **Gail Toland and Sondra Kaplan** for leading, **Gail Kutin** for Torah reading and **Rona Lesser** for the d'var Torah.

June 7th: Tikkun Leil Shavuot with **Rabbi Michael Rascoe**. Thanks to **Sara Norris & Gail Kutin** for arranging the program and to **Sondra Kaplan** for providing the refreshments.

June 10th: Erev Shabbat service and potluck dinner with **JRF Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman**. Thank you to **Andrea Turner** for hosting and **Rabbi Litman** for leading the service and the discussion about Reconstructionism.

Special thanks to Rabbi Michael Rascoe who led a very interesting text study about the authorship of the Torah at the Tikun Leil Shavuot study session.

Special thanks also to Rabbi Jane Litman, Western Region representative for the JRF for her supportive guidance and for leading our erev Shabbat service and a study session about the principles of Reconstructionist Judaism on Friday, June 10th.

KHL Reading/Discussion Group by Jeanne Saletan

Jeff Meyer led us in two songs/poems by poet Leonard Cohen on May 21st. Cohen is a singer and songwriter from the 50's to the present. "Who by Fire" is a creative take-off on the High Holy Days prayer, "U'Ntaneh Tokef" and "Hallelujah" is his interpretation rooted in several different Biblical stories from Judges, Samuel I and Samuel II.

Jeanne Saletan led a discussion on June 18 of a short story, "Chosen Out of Many" by Albert Memmi about a young Sephardic Jew born in Tunisia which gave us a

glimpse of that Jewish culture under French colonialism prior to its independence in 1956.

We have recently been joined by **Lisa Trimarchi** who will lead the next session on July 16th followed by new members, **Judy Margolin** and **David Kahne** on August 20th.

Leadership of discussions rotates among members who choose selected readings and make them available in advance. **Visitors are welcome!**

Phyllis Schatz hosts our group at her home on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 4PM. Some of us go out to dinner afterwards. What a wonderful way to spend a Shabbat afternoon!

August reading is to be announced at a later date.

More info from Jeanne: Jeanne.saletan@gmail.com

Donations:

In Memory of David Saletan
Mikael Steinberg

In Memory of Hana Staub
Jeff Meyer
Madeleine Boskovitz

July – August 2011

Birthdays

Andrea Turner 7/1
Ilana Reisz 8/2
Gail Kutin 8/10

Anniversaries

Hannah and Norman Decker 8/11

Yahrzeits

Phyllis Schatz remembers **Abe Pollack**

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Calendar – July & August 2011

There will be no service on Sat. July 2nd due to the July 4th holiday weekend.

Fri., July 8th at 7 PM & Sat. July 9th at 10 AM. Shabbaton with Rabbi Alexis Pearce. Theme: **What it means to be blessed and what does G-d require of us?** Catered dinner on Fri.evening. \$15 for non-members and a veg/dairy pot luck lunch on Sat. At JCC Merfish Teen Center, 9000 S. Braeswood, Houston, Texas.

Sat., July 16th at 4 PM. Reading Discussion Group at the home of **Phyllis Schatz**. Reading: **A selection from David Ruderman's book, "Early Modern Jewry"** to be led by **Lisa Trimarchi**.

Sat., Aug. 6th: at 10 AM. Shabbat Morning Service: Leader: **Gail Kutin**. Torah Reader: **TBA**. D'var: **TBA**. A vegetarian/dairy potluck lunch after services at JCC Merfish Teen Center, 9000 S. Braeswood, Houston, Texas.

Mon., Aug. 8th at 7:30 PM. Erev Tisha B'Av at the home of **Gail Kutin**. The evening will begin with a film about the Spanish Inquisition, recitations of kinot and conclude with the chanting of Eicha (The Book of Lamentations). Bring flashlights and pillows (for those who wish to sit on the floor). RSVP (and for directions) to Gail via email to gailkut@comcast.net or at 713-436-0068.

Fri., Aug. 12th at 7 PM. Kabbalat Shabbat Service & Pot Luck Vegetarian/Dairy Dinner at the home of **Gail & Buster Toland**. Leader: **Gail Toland & Sondra Kaplan**.

Sat., Aug. 20th at 4 PM. Reading Discussion Group. Location and reading **TBA**.

July 8th & 9th

Shabbaton
with
Rabbi Alexis Pearce

What does it mean to be blessed?

What does G-d require of us?

Friday evening service, catered dinner,
discussion
Saturday Services and Potluck Lunch
Saturday Afternoon discussion

JCC Merfish Center
9000 S. Rice @ N. Braeswood

RSVP to kolhalevhouston@gmail.com

Tisha B'Av – August 9, 2011



1850 painting by David Roberts entitled *The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem*: