



Chadashot Ha'am

December 2011

Kislev/Tevet 5772

A Message from Rabbi Saks

I have a confession to make. Santa used to bring me gifts. My family celebrated Christmas nearly every year of my childhood, even though both my mother and father are Jewish. Each year, we'd trek across the street to the Borths' house where we not only participated in their Christmas rituals, but actually had stockings hung on their fireplace and gifts for us under their tree. As a child, like many children who celebrate Christmas, I fully believed that Santa brought me gifts. I even remember a conversation when my brother and I shared our disbelief in Santa's existence; my father's response was, "Well, when you stop believing in Santa Claus, he stops bringing you presents." And so, we went on believing.

My participation in this Christmas ritual made me no less secure in my Jewish identity. Chanukah was also a big part of my childhood, with gifts on the fireplace mantle, two menorahs burning (one belonging to each set of my grandparents), my father's *latkes*, and *dreidel* games at relatives' houses. While gift giving was a big part of both of these holiday celebrations throughout my youth, I realize what I took away from them was the importance of family and friends, the value of being together, and the many ways in which we can brighten each others' lives.



Chanukah and Christmas are polar opposites – pardon the pun – in their religious significance. Christmas is a central holiday in the Christian tradition, one whose primary theme is the birth of Jesus.

Chanukah, however, is one of Judaism's most minor holidays, not even earning a place in the Hebrew Bible. Their seemingly parallel importance is a result of American culture, not of religious tradition. Christmas has been America's most significant gift giving season for over a hundred years, since Christmas was commercialized in the 19th century. It is not just a recent development.

When our Jewish ancestors arrived in this country, seeking to be a part of the larger American culture, they began to appropriate Chanukah with the same gift giving status as Christmas - not because of Jewish religious practice, but as a statement about their place in American culture. What Christmas and Chanukah do have in common is the message of increasing light and hope that both holidays offer in these darkest days of our year. It is no coincidence that Chanukah and Christmas fall so close to the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year. Both reassure us that the days will start getting longer again, that there is new hope and new light in the world. And the Chanukah menorah is a physical representation for us of this increase of light.

Growing up Jewish in a largely Christian environment can sometimes make it hard to just celebrate Chanukah. Christmas can leave us feeling excluded. And for those of us with more than one tradition in our families, we strive not to feel guilty about celebrating a holiday that we wouldn't officially claim as our own.

As a rabbi, it's important to me that Chanukah play a central role in the life of the Jewish community, and as an American rabbi, I also recognize that Christmas is all around us at this time of year. I don't think that it makes me a bad Jew to celebrate Christmas with people who are close to me, whether they are my family or my friends. We have all been to someone else's birthday party. Sometimes, especially as children, we even left with a gift for ourselves, perhaps a gift bag or the like. We had a good time. And, we knew that it wasn't our birthday.

I hope that as the days get shorter in the weeks ahead, you remember two of the most important miracles of Chanukah: the Maccabees held onto their tradition even as they wrestled with what it meant to live among another culture, and the light they kindled increased even when it should have burnt out. May this season be one of brightness, blessing and peace.

President's Message - Lisa Pierce

If you will, I will

By the time you read this, we will have celebrated Rabbi Saks's installation here at Congregation Bet Ha'am and formally acknowledged our covenantal relationship. As we are preparing for this important milestone in the life of our community, I am thinking a lot about "covenant" and what that word implies.

More solemn than an ordinary promise, the word "covenant" comes with biblical echoes and visions of lightning flashes atop mountains. Like the covenant that God enters into with the Israelites, in which God will protect us if we follow the commandments, there is an element of conditionality implied. In a covenantal relationship, it's not just a one-sided assurance; we promise certain behavior to each other. If you will, I will.

A covenant sounds more awesome than just a promise. And by awesome I mean both amazing and inspiring awe. In the case of our covenant with Rabbi Saks, it's awesome that we can embrace the love and support of our good relationship and shout from the rooftops our excitement about the future together. And I am awe-struck and humbled as I consider the responsibilities that we have to each other as we promise to support each other, to bring out the best in each other and to encourage each other to strive for greatness.



Bet Ha'am has a similar covenant with our congregation. We support the community through financial contributions, through volunteer time and expertise, and through our attendance. In return, the congregation provides us with meaningful worship services that are accessible to all, inspiration and guidance to live Jewishly no matter where we are on our Jewish journeys, ample opportunities for adult learning, a comprehensive religious school for our children, and a caring and active community that we can count on in a number of ways.

In browsing through the URJ website for ideas, I came across a sample Covenant of Membership that a synagogue in Nashville, Tennessee developed. If you are curious, you can view this document by clicking on the link below. Through their Covenant of Membership, the people of Congregation Ohabai Sholom have made a promise to each other to maintain a vibrant and supportive home for Reform Judaism in their community. Some of the specifics outlined in their covenant might work for our community here, and some of them might not. But it seems like a

I propose that it isn't just Rabbi Saks who has a covenantal relationship with Congregation Bet Ha'am. I think perhaps that each of us as a member of

good place to begin. What does it mean to be a member of Congregation Bet Ha'am? What can we each expect from each other? What can we expect of ourselves? I look forward to hearing your thoughts and continuing this conversation throughout the coming months.

I can be reached most easily by email at lisapie@maine.rr.com, or you can catch me in person at most synagogue services and events. And by the way, the URJ website is a wealth of information, not just on synagogue management, but on all aspects of Jewish life. If you come across something else you like there, please let me know!

Chadashot Chai-lights

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December

Congregation Bet Ha'am

81 Westbrook Street
 South Portland, Maine 04106
 Phone (207) 879-0028
 Fax (207) 879-1866
 TTY available
www.bethaam.org

Rabbi Jared Saks

Orly Mendelson Biggie, Religious School Director
 Pam Denuette, Synagogue Administrator
 Teri Berenson, Bookkeeper
 Chris Skidgel, Custodian

Executive Committee

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 Lisa Munderback, Vice President
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 Deborah Tillman Stone
 Joanne Turnbull

Office Hours:

Tuesday - Friday, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM
 The office is closed on Mondays.
 Building Use: All meetings, events or gatherings must be scheduled with the office.

Office extensions and email addresses:

Rabbi Saks, Ext. 100
ravsaks@bethaam.org
 Orly Biggie, Religious School Director, Ext. 102
orly@bethaam.org
 Pam Denuette, Synagogue Administrator, Ext. 104
pam@bethaam.org
 Teri Berenson, Bookkeeper, Ext. 103
teri@bethaam.org
office@bethaam.org

From the Religious School Director

Orly Mendelson Biggie



This year we will not hold classes during the week of *Chanukah* since it falls during winter vacation. We will continue our tradition of sending home a box of candles and a bag of chocolate *gelt*. Hopefully the candy *gelt* will make it home!

How did the tradition of giving *gelt* begin? The word "*gelt*" means money in Yiddish. The tradition began around

the 17th century in Poland when young children received money to give to their teachers for *Chanukah*. Gradually, this tradition changed and the children got to keep some of the money for themselves. Poor yeshiva students would receive their *gelt* from richer Jews, who were their benefactors. Why coins? Some say it is related to the Maccabees' victory, after which they minted national coins that had the image of the seven branches of the menorah embossed on them.

Chocolate *gelt* became popular in the 1920s when the first candy coins were created by the Loft's candy company. Today most of the chocolate *Chanukah gelt* is imported from Israel. In Israel the traditional *minhag* (custom) of giving real *gelt* (money) continues in many families.

I wish you all a *Chanukah* full of lights – *Chag Urim Sameach*.

Religious School News

LOTS OF GRADE 2 EVENTS!

The Grade 2 field trip will be on December 4. All students must return their signed permission slips to participate.

Grades 2A & 2B will participate in the Shabbat family service on Friday, December 9. A Shabbat pot-luck dinner for the students and their families will begin at 5:30 PM. Please RSVP by December 2.

The second session of the Grade 2 Family Connection will be on Sunday, December 11, from 9:30 to noon.

Thank you to last month's substitute teachers: Deborah Tillman Stone, Amy Iris, Shari Broder and Peter Scott

Thank you to Andrew Steinberg for sharing his wonderful *challah* baking skills with our first graders and their parents during the first grade Shabbat family program.

Schedule of Services

Friday, December 2

Kabbalat Shabbat Service 7:30 PM

Saturday, December 3

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

Tyler Richman, son of
Michael & Nicole Richman
Parsha Vayetzei

Friday, December 9

Family Kabbalat Shabbat 6:30 PM

Saturday, December 10

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

Elizabeth Lemieux, daughter of
Pamela Weiss & Ken Lemieux
Parsha Vayishlach

Friday, December 16

Kabbalat Shabbat Service 7:30 PM

Saturday, December 17

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

Parsha Vayeshev

Friday, December 23

Kabbalat Shabbat Service 6:30 PM

Saturday, December 24

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

Parsha Miketz

Friday, December 30

Kabbalat Shabbat Service 7:30 PM

Saturday, December 31

Torah Study 9:00 AM

Worship Service 10:00 AM

Parsha Vayigash

**Please join the congregation in
celebration as our students are called to
the Torah as B'nai Mitzvah.**

Social Action Committee News

The next meeting of the Social Action Committee will be on December 4 at 10 AM. All are welcome.

Please help with our recycling efforts by putting your plates, food waste, etc. in the correct bins at Bet Ha'am's onegs.

The Social Action Committee is holding its annual Winter Clothing Drive to help the many families in our community who are low-income or homeless. We have set up a donation box in the entrance area of the synagogue. We ask that you consider donating winter jackets (adult or child), sweaters, hats, gloves, scarves, boots or shoes that are clean and in good condition.

At our *Kabbalat Shabbat* service on October 21, we provided information about volunteering to help meet the educational needs of recent immigrants. Here is contact information for places that need volunteers to tutor, assist in classes and serve as mentors:

LearningWorks

Keri-Ann Penick, Volunteer Coordinator

kapenick@learningworks.me

775-0105 x163

Portland Adult Education and Citizenship Tutoring

874-8155

Refugee Resettlement Program

Aimee Bullard, Volunteer Coordinator

523-2737

Portland Mentoring Alliance

Glenn Nerbak, Portland High School

874-8250

Winter Clothing Drive

Please consider donating winter jackets, sweaters, hats, gloves, scarves, winter boots or shoes that are clean and in good condition.

See page 4 for details.

S.P.O.R.T.Y.

December 26: Matisyahu Concert

February 10-12: Winter Wonderland Regional Event in Manchester, NH

For more information, contact:
JD Lichtman, youth group advisor, at
lichtmanjd@gmail.com

Spread the Warmth Of Chanukah Lights!

This year marks the second year of the Jewish Family Services' (JFS) Chanukah Lights Holiday Assistance program. Chanukah Lights assists families in need around the holidays with items such as warm winter clothing, toys for children, or gift cards. JFS has identified 19 families in our community who are looking for a little help this holiday season – boots for children, hats, mittens or anything with a princess or Thomas the Tank Engine theme! Are you interested in assisting a family this season? It's a great opportunity for your family, your office, your book club, or your mah-jongg friends to do a *mitzvah* (good deed)! Please contact Ali Knight at aknight@mainejewish.org or 772-1959 and she will provide you a wish list of items.



Calling All Knitters (and/or people who can work a crochet hook)!

Bet Ha'am member Rosie Wohl visits hospital patients and other ill individuals in our community in her role as a lay chaplain.

It is a tradition in many religious communities to make prayer shawls or comfort shawls for people who are challenged with illness. Rosie would like to be able to give her Jewish patients knitted or crocheted shawls made by those who would agree to offer a Jewish prayer for healing, a *misheberach*, as the shawl is started and completed.

If your hands and heart are inclined to help create one or more shawls for the patients Rosie visits, please contact either Karen Lukas (karenlukas@hotmail.com) or Donna Landau (dmlandau@hotmail.com). The shawls should be approximately 20 inches wide by 60 inches long and made with soft, acrylic, machine washable yarn. Patterns can be as simple or as complicated as you'd like. If you want some easy patterns, Karen and Donna can offer you ideas. We will affix a message that is specific to our Jewish faith to each shawl.

Negotiating Chanukah and Christmas: Lighten Up, It's Going To Be OK!



Join Rabbi Saks for a conversation about Chanukah, Christmas, and the nuances of these holidays in your multi-faith family.

We will explore common themes, religious differences, and help each other create a pathway to a warm holiday experience.

Sunday, December 4

9:30-11:30 AM

In the Sanctuary

Adult Education Survey

The Adult Education Committee hopes every adult in our congregation will find at least one program of interest that is offered at a convenient time during 5772 (2011-2012).

Please help us plan Adult Education programs for Bet Ha'am by completing our survey and letting us know what and when you would like to learn.

The survey can be taken online at <http://tiny.cc/AdultEdSurvey>. Paper copies will be available at the synagogue. The more people who fill out our survey, the better our chances are of offering courses that you want to take!

Please contact us if you are interested in joining the Adult Education Committee or teaching a class.

Please also contact the office or Lynn Urbach, urbach1@maine.rr.com, to let us know what classes you will attend. All classes are free of charge unless otherwise noted.

Condolences to Daniel Oppenheim on the loss of his father, Felix

Condolences to Faith Moritz and Janet Jones on the loss of Faith's father, Ronald Moritz

Condolences to Ariel Glaser on the loss of her mother, Emmanuela Sara bat Abraham Mihel

Rabbi Soffin and Rabbi Saks at Installation weekend



Mazel Tov

Mazel Tov to Joanne Turnbull and Michael Alpren on their new granddaughters, Jordan Rose Carlin (5 lb. 9 oz.) and Nola Jane Carlin (5 lb. 2 oz.), who were born at 2:02 and 2:03 PM on November 8. The twins and their parents are doing well.

Mazel Tov to Amy Sneirson on her appointment as Executive Director of the Maine Human Rights Commission. The appointment will become effective on January 1. The Human Rights Commission is the independent state agency that enforces Maine's anti-discrimination law, the Maine Human Rights Act. Amy has been the Managing Attorney of the Civil Rights Program at the Maine Center on Deafness since 2006.

Welcome New Members

Ellin & David Ruffner

Margaret Cugini

Eric Brodar

Welcome Back

Doug & Andrea Alford

Join the Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery

We invite you to join the Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery today! We have many needs and many ways for you to contribute. If you have an event you would like to celebrate, a person you would like to honor, a *yahrzeit* to remember, or you just want to help support our programs, please fill out the form and send it along with your check to Bet Ha'am. Include an address if you would like an acknowledgement to be sent.

Our Donor Gallery listing should read:

Please acknowledge to: _____

Your name: _____

Check enclosed for \$ _____

Fund choice (please check one):

- _____ General Fund
- _____ Sandmel Education Fund
- _____ Building Capital Campaign
- _____ Berkowitz Open Door Fund
- _____ Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- _____ Youth Fund
- _____ Cohen Fund for Worship & Learning
- _____ Religious School Library Fund
- _____ Adult Library Fund
- _____ Rosalyn S. & Sumner T. Bernstein
Scholar in Residence Fund
- _____ *Bikur Cholim* (hospital chaplaincy)
- _____ Tutor Fund

Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery

We thank our generous contributors

Annual Fund

- Sam & Katherine Hirsh
- Jill Rosenthal
- Lee Jacobson & Cory Kuhl
- Anne Babineau in honor of Rabbi Saks
- Eleanor Goldberg
- Barry Gass in memory of John Gass & Stella Sarfaty Gass
- In memory of Irving Poliner by Barbara Poliner
- Sue Howard
- In memory of Irving Poliner by David & Alison Moore
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Joy Cohen
- Rich & Cybele Brooks

Bikur Cholim

- In memory of Michael Barriault by Maxine Sclar
- In memory of Robert Tancredi by Stephen Silverman & Catherine Smith
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Martin & Rochelle Dassa
- In memory of Michael Barriault by Rita Kissen
- In memory of Michael Barriault by Norman & Karen Alterman
- To honor Rosie Wohl by Ray & Ginger Spiro
- For the honor of the aliyah on Yom Kippur by Ray & Ginger Spiro
- In memory of Michael Barriault by Steve & Harriet Passerman
- In memory of Michael Barriault by Penelope Reilly
- In appreciation of Larry Landau by Susan Cummings-Lawrence
- In memory of Michael Barriault by Susan Cummings-Lawrence

- In memory of Michael Barriault by Ellie & Charlie Miller
- In memory of Michael Barriault by Fran & Alan Schneit
- In honor of Rosie Wohl by Sr Margaret A Coyne

Capital Campaign

- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by the Cohen family
- In memory of Felix Oppenheim by Rona & Robert Rosenthal
- In memory of Felix Oppenheim by Jeremy Moser & Laura Kittle
- In honor of Gail Johnson becoming Bat Mitzvah by Jeremy Moser & Laura Kittle
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Charlotte Rodetsky

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Robert & Sylvia Kaufmann
- In appreciation by Rabbi & Mrs. Philip Berkowitz
- In appreciation of Rabbi Saks by Seth & Katherine Lashkowitz
- To welcome Rabbi Saks by Wilma Rose
- In appreciation of Sharon & Perry Newman for their beautiful music by the Horowitz Kass family
- In appreciation of Rabbi Saks by the Horowitz Kass family
- In honor of Emma Scott becoming Bat Mitzvah by the Horowitz Kass family

We thank our generous contributors

Bet Ha'am Donor Gallery

Religious School

- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Stephen Clayman & Paula Chessin

General Fund

- In appreciation and awe of Jane Snerson and her kugel by Teri Berenson
- In celebration of the birth of Aviva Lily Lederman by Gram Teri Berenson
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Rachel Weinstein
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Peter Preble
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Suzanne Jacovino
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Gloria & Albert Bass
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by John Fein
- In memory of Saul Polisner on his *yahrzeit* by Duane & Evie Polisner
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Leslie & Barry Girmscheid
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Robert & Erica Becker
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Rabbi & Mrs. Goldstein
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Marc Lerman
- In appreciation, given anonymously
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by David & Margaret Kashman
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Ellen Werner
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Joanne & Ron Charles
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Burt & Elaine Epstein
- In appreciation by Stuart & Carole Potter
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Alan Goldstein
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by David & Ellen Cooper
- In honor of Josie Pierce becoming Bat Mitzvah by Bill & Fran Strauss

- In appreciation of Sharon & Perry Newman for their beautiful music by Russ & Lisa Pierce
- In honor of Ellie Miller, a wise and wonderful teacher, by Russ & Lisa Pierce
- In appreciation of Rabbi Saks for his warmth and good humor by Russ & Lisa Pierce
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Katherine Rydell
- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Richard & Marcia Ringel
- In honor of Josie Pierce becoming Bat Mitzvah by Charrisse Kaplan & David Johnson
- In honor of Josie Pierce becoming Bat Mitzvah by Andrea Saks

Sandmel Education Fund

- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Jodi Lerman & Howard Feller

Youth Fund

- In appreciation of High Holy Day services by Esther & Stephen Weiner

December 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	
				<i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 7:30 PM	Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM <i>Tyler Richman</i> <i>Bar Mitzvah</i>	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Religious School 9:00 AM-Noon Negotiating Chanukah/ Christmas 9:30 AM- 11:30 AM Social Action Committee 10:00 AM Evening Religious School 5:00-7:30 PM	Office Closed		Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM		2nd Grade Potluck Dinner 5:30 PM Family <i>Kabbalat</i> <i>Shabbat</i> Service 6:30 PM	Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM <i>Elizabeth Lemieux</i> <i>Bat Mitzvah</i>
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Religious School 9:00 AM-Noon Grade 2 Family Connection 9:30 AM-Noon Evening Religious School 5:00-7:30 PM	Office Closed	Board of Trustees Meeting 6:30 PM	Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM		<i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 7:30 PM	Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Religious School 9:00 AM-Noon Evening Religious School 5:00-7:30 PM	Office Closed		Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM		<i>Chanukah</i> Potluck Dinner 5:30 PM <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 6:30 PM <i>Oneg</i> cookie decorating following services.	Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
No Religious School	Office Closed		Morning <i>Minyan</i> 7:00 AM		<i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Service 7:30 PM	Torah Study 9:00 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM