The Shofar

April, 1991

Greens Host Home Shabbat April 26

Bookings begin for May 17 service, BBQ buffet in Tai Tam; visiting rabbi to conduct May 31 service

Bob and Grace Green are hosting a service April 26 in their home at 1 Robinson Road, Flat 4A. **It starts at 8:15 p.m.** and will be followed by an Oneg Shabbat. There is limited visitor parking.

As you come up Garden Road and off the roundabout onto Robinson Road, bear left and avoid going onto the overpass. No. 1 is the first driveway on the left and is behind and to the left of Villa Elegance. The lobby is in a red and black and white motif.

To help Grace plan, please call 463-8156 and inform Mrs. Joyce Anderson if you will be coming.

If you'd like to make Shabbat special by hosting a service at home, please get the word to us.

In light of the popularity with families of the UJC services followed by poolside BBQ buffets at The American Club in Tai Tam, another has been planned for May 17. The service begins at 6:30 p.m. in the Bay Room and the BBQ at 7:30. The buffet is $190 for adults, $100 for children under 12, and $50 for toddlers.

To book, please call or send a check to The UJC and specify the number of adults, children, and toddlers. Because of commitments The UJC must make in advance, cancellations less than 48 hours before the event are not refundable.

Planning is also underway for a Shabbat service on May 31 which visiting Rabbi David Davis of University of San Francisco has offered to conduct. Details will be announced later.

Torah Fund Established

Donations Sought for Ark, Accessories

As the time draws near that The UJC will obtain its first Torah, the General Committee has established a Torah Fund to cover the expenses of an ark, the dressing and decorations that go with the Torah, and incidental related costs. The honor of funding the Torah itself has gone to members Harold Sandler and Andrew Pleatman who most generously pledged contributions to cover the cost when the idea was first announced at High Holyday services last fall.

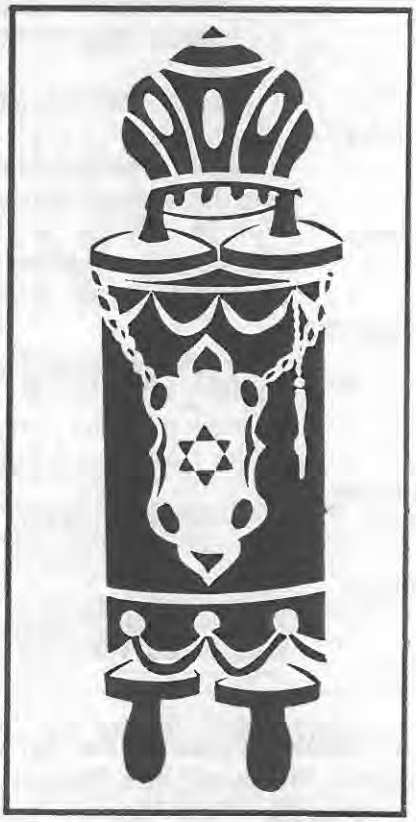
In view of the wish expressed by other members to participate in this most special mitzva, donations will be gratefully received and set aside to cover the additional expenses, as they arise. According to a letter just received, Rabbi Sam Joseph will be purchasing the Torah in New York within the next week or two. Once the dimensions and style are known, attention can be given to buying a crown *(keter)*, pointer (*yad*), mantle *me'il*), and possibly a breastplate (*tas*).

Hopefully, our treasurer Victor Falk will be returning from his current visit to England with some guidelines or assistance from his synagogue in London on how we should go about obtaining or building an ark to house the Scrolls. Rabbi Joseph is also researching this subject for us. UJC members who have some special knowledge or skill in this respect are urged to come forward and make their talents known and available.

A special ceremony in which the Torah will be received by the Congregation and honors bestowed on those contributing will be held in early September when Rabbi Joseph arrives to conduct High Holyday services.

Considering that the Torah is the holiest and most highly prized possession of a Jewish congregation, there is a lasting and special historical significance that attaches to association with this particular acquisition.

Please make checks out to The United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong and specify "Torah Fund" in your cover letter. Donations of any size will be welcome. Mail to GPO Box 6083, Hong Kong.



"See I have imparted to you laws and ordinances, as the Lord my God has commanded me . . . Observe them faithfully for that will be proof of your wisdom and understanding in the sight of other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, 'Surely this is a great nation of wise and understanding people. . . ' For what great nation is there, that has laws and ordinances as perfect as all this Teaching that I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:5-8)

Children's Education Update

As in previous terms, the Ezekial Abraham Jewish School is offering Sunday and mid-week classes in its current spring session. These are geared to a variety of ages and needs. Registration is still open through school principal Mrs. Nurit Malachi (801-5476 or 572-4683). Classes meet at The Jewish Club.

SUNDAY SCHEDULE: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Nursery Class (3-4 years)
Kindergarten Class (4-5 years)
Preparatory Class (5-7 years)
Intermediate Class (7-9 years)
Senior class (9-11 years)

MID-WEEK SCHEDULE

Monday:
Hebrew conversation for beginners — 4-5:30 p.m.
Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes — 5-6:30 p.m.

Tuesday:
Non-Hebrew speakers - preparatory, intermediate and senior classes — 3:30-5 p.m. and 5-6:30 p.m.

Wednesday:
Non-Hebrew speakers - kindergarten and preparatory class — 3:30-5 p.m.
Hebrew speakers - preparatory, intermediate, and senior classes — 5-6:30 p.m.

Thursday:
Non-Hebrew speakers - intermediate and senior classes — 5-6:30 p.m.

Friday:
Kabalat Shabbat class for kindergarten (4-5 years)
Hebrew conversation for beginners — 4-5:30 p.m.

An additional class for Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation is also available. Please call Mrs. Malachi.

A new class — the "*Tzutzik*" class for children 15 months and over — has recently been formed. The aim of the course is to develop children's awareness of themselves and their surroundings as well as to familiarize them with the concepts of Jewish festivals, holidays, and Shabbat. The classes, to be taught by Mrs. Rinat Harel, will meet Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 12.

A children's service for ages 4 to 10 followed by Kiddush and cookies is conducted every Saturday by Mrs. Abrahams from 11 a.m. to 12.

The School is also planning the following activities:
Sunday, April 21 — Visit to the Israeli Consulate
Sunday, May 5 — Lag-B'Omer Sports Day
Sunday, May 12 — Jerusalem Day in School
The last day of spring term is Sunday, June 23.

"Give Me Your Children"

Given her extensive experience (over 25 years as a teacher and school principal in Israel) and enthusiasm, who could we possibly find to do a better job of teaching and supervising the Jewish education of our children than Mrs. Nurit Malachi, principal of The Ezekial Abraham Jewish School.

Recognizing the difficulties and inefficient use of teaching talents and resources that would result from separate religious schools, Mrs. Malachi has done an excellent job of bridging the gaps we find in our community and integrating children of UJC members into the existing school. A measure of her success is heard in the frequent praise from her students and their parents alike.

It's apparent in speaking with Mrs. Malachi that like all good educators, she has a strong love for her pupils as well and is eager to do whatever she can for them. "Give me your children," she says, reaching out her arms, and you can feel that this is someone who pours her heart into what she does.

Given her interest and experience in adult education, Mrs. Malachi has also expressed her willingness to lend a hand in these areas as well. With a little luck, she may be available to conduct one of the Heritage history sessions in the series currently underway. The community is fortunate to have someone with her talents and dedication. It is only hoped that she will stay here to help us for many years to come.

JWA Books Former U.S. Cousul to Speak

Mr. Burt Levin, formerly U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong, will give an after-dinner speech at The Jewish Club on May 22. His subject is "Three and-a-half Decades in Asia."

All members of the community are welcome ("including husbands, this time", reports organizer and president of the Jewish Women's Association, Anne Godfrey).

To book, call Anne (873-0464) or Iren Lipin (526-8058) or sign up at The Jewish Club.

Caring Community

As The UJC membership continues to grow, members of the General Committee have come to believe that we should be in a position to provide support when there is a need in the lives of our fellow congregants. The needs which we would like to address are:

1/. Help or support when there is a death in the immediate family.
2. Visits to hospitalized and/or homebound members.
3/. Transportation for members who need help getting to the hospital or doctor's office for therapy or treatment.
4/. Support for people with ongoing problems or at times of a family crisis.

To make The UJC a more personal and meaningful congregation, we are looking for volunteers to form a "Caring Community Committee." If you would like to help in this important activity, please call or fax Janet Golden at 812-1624.

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The Shofar

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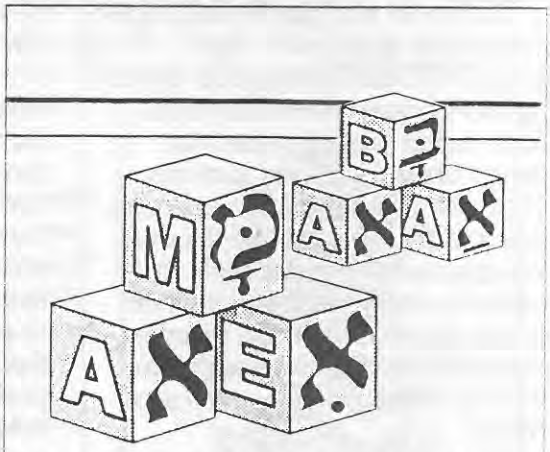
New Crash Course in Hebrew Planned for May

How to read a 5000-year old language in Five Easy Lessons

The UJC is again offering members of the commuinity the opportunity to read Hebrew in five ● one-and-a hour-and-a-half lessons. The Congregation has just received specially-developed materials and tape recordings from the U.S. which have been used with remarkable success to teach over 30,000 Americans to read the language in five-session crash courses.



Hebrew School: Not Just For Kids

Because Hebrew is a phonetic language, those who are properly motivated will find that they can master the alphabet within a few lessons and follow Hebrew prayers at services. "Graduates" of the first UJC course found it to be a truly rewarding experience. Grace Green, Kathy Goeld, and Marie-France Falk were able to use their newly-acquired ability to bless the candles at The UJC seder last month, reading from the original Hebrew. Now, with the help of new materials, classes are likely to be even more beneficial, interesting, and productive.

It's hoped to run the classes for five consecutive weeks beginning early May at 6:30 or 7 p.m. weeknights. Actual dates for the classes will be decided upon to suit the majority of those attending. Please call Mrs. Joyce Anderson at 463-8156 and indicate your preference. The course fee will be determined by the number of students who register.

Volunteers are needed to help The UJC maintain its name list and data base, coordinate events, handle phone calls and bookings, write for The Shofar, maintain files, etc. The most important qualification is enthusiasm.

If you are looking for a meaningful way to spend a few hours a week working from either your home, office, or office of another member, please get in touch with Bob Green at The UJC.

UJC to note *Yahrzeits*

The *yahrzeit* is the anniversary of someone's death. It's customary on this date every year to light a memorial candle or lamp to burn from sunset to sunset. A burning light is connected with the idea of immortality — perhaps as suggested in Proverbs 20:27: "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."

In accordance with practice, The UJC will make note of the *yahrzeit* at the Friday service following the event.

Members are urged to write or fax The UJC with the names and dates of *yahrzeits* . The information will be maintained in our computer database and the name(s) read at services.

Ritual on the Rise

By Sanford Selser

Reprinted (abridged) from REFORM JUDAISM, Spring 1991

New worship and ritual patterns are emerging in Reform congregations that represent a radical departure from the recent past. Where custom and ceremony were once marginal and the use of Hebrew negligible, heightened ritual involvement will, in all likelihood, be characteristic of the Reform synagogue of the 21st century.

This trend was confirmed in a recent survey prepared by the UAHC-CCAR Commission On Religious Living, which asked Reform congregations to describe their worship and ritual patterns. Over 425 congregations responded, many of them noting that the survey questions were precisely those currently being discussed by their temple board or its ritual practices committee in their own search for ways to enhance the worship experience.

Among the questionnaire's most important findings is the renewed importance of the Shabbat morning service among Reform Jews. Not only has Shabbat morning become the preferred time for conducting bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies among the overwhelming majority of reporting congregations (384), but more than half indicate that a Shabbat service is held regularly on mornings when there are no b'nai mitrzvah. But 77% still maintain the primacy of the Friday evening service.

Kipot are provided by 244 congregations and another 28 require the wearing of skull caps. No less dramatic are ritual changes linked to reading of the Torah. Historically, it was customary for the rabbi to recite the blessings before and after the reading of the Torah. Now, 373 congregations invite lay persons to do so. Other *aliyot* include Maftir (160 congregations), lifting and dressing the Torah (200), and opening and closing the ark (216). Furthermore, 55% of the congregations report that marching with the Torah is now part of the synagogue ritual. Finally, in direct contrast to the practice of classical Reform, 146 of the respondents say they observe a second day of Rosh Hashanah.

Formerly it was common in many Reform congregations to hold holiday celebrations on the nearest weekend to the occasion rather than on the exact date in order to insure a larger attendance and, presumably, to avoid interference with the normal work schedule. Today, festivals are celebrated by most congregations on their prescribed date.

Although no definitive statistics exist regarding the number of intermarried couples affiliated with Reform congregations, it is estimated that they constitute 10%-20% of the membership. Since the rate of intermarriage has not diminished, their numbers will increase in the years ahead. The questionnaire's findings pertaining to the ritual prerogatives of non-Jewish family members show that 140 congregations permit non-Jews to bless the Sabbath candles, 57 to recite the Torah blessings, and 91 to either lift or tie the Torah.

The contemporary Reform synagogue is fashioning exactly what Issac Mayer Wise anticipated a century ago when he spoke of a Minhag America. Worship modes of the 21st century will be those reflecting the needs and aspirations of a fully integrated Jewish community rather than a foreign importation. This 21st century vision of Wise's dream is noted for its resymbolization of Jewish life, the democratization of the synagogue experience, and a concerted effort after the Holocaust to recover Jewish memory.

As with all American religious institutions, the Reform synagogue has also been shaped by an array of secular forces. Their influence is often overlooked in explaining what has occurred. The synagogue, like the church, has mirrored the American intellectual and cultural revolution that began at the end of World War II and is still evolving.

The old order of formality, distance, decorum, and absolute authority has given way to a search for intimacy and informality.

Reform Judaism is now entering a new phase of its creative existence. it may differ in form from its antecedents, but in spirit it represents the fulfillment of the vision of its founders who welcomed all truth, whether drawn from the past or driven by present realities. ❑

Jews by Choice Sign-Up and Survey

Jews by choice and non-Jewish friends or spouses who are either planning to convert or wish to be included in planning and events for the Jews by Choice Group are asked to send in the form below to Martha Josephson, 15 Peak Gardens, 18 Mount Austin Rd., Hong Kong. We need your imput and remember, it costs nothing to join!

Name _____

Spouse or friend's name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____(h)_____ (o) Fax _____

Interested in:

❑ Hebrew lessons ❑ Rabbinical counseling

❑ Home study guide ❑ Social gatherings

❑ Informal guidance/counseling ❑ Other (below)

_____

_____

I ❑ am ❑ am not interested in exploring the conversion process.

From the Chairman . . .

Time for an Awakening

From discussions with leaders of our Jewish community over the last few weeks, it has become very clear that there is a strong desire, motivated partly by exigent financial considerations, to find ways to increase the membership and patronage of The Jewish Club by Reform Jews and others. Pressing as these financial problems may be, it's only by dealing with the root cause of discontent in our community that we can hope, over a period of time, to strengthen The Club. Only by recognizing the problem can we see the solution, to paraphrase G.K. Chesterton.

The most important function of a Jewish congregation is to gather together for worship. This is the need which must be met before all others. Although Reform and other non-Orthodox Jews are generally acknowledged to represent the majority in our community, no place has been provided for them to hold services in which they can have mixed seating, participation by women, and use of instrumental music, all distinguishing features of Reform Judaism.

Permission to use The Jewish Club has been denied on *halachic* (Jewish law) grounds. And yet this interpretation, in the absence of any supporting evidence or documentation, mystifies the great majority including many Orthodox. From my own reading and discussions with rabbis I find no such injunctions at all on Orthodox and non-Orthodox using the same place to pray, even including the synagogue. I seek enlightenment.

It is difficult for Reform Jews to feel comfortable in a place where their form of worship has been specifically disallowed, the implication being that their ritual, style of observance, and content of belief somehow diminish the quality of their Jewishness or status as Jews. It's quite understandable that many Reform Jews can not easily put aside these feelings as if they didn't exist and happily join together for social activities, Jewish celebrations, or a meal at The Jewish Club. Despite the best intentions and efforts by members of The Jewish Club to "create" a friendly atmosphere, a number of Reform Jews will continue to feel unwelcome and unaccepted as long as these attitudes prevail.

The solution is **not** to make The Jewish Club a purely social or recreational club in which no Jewish religious services at all are permitted. In fact, to make it truly function as a Jewish community center and enhance revenues, every effort should be made to encourage all Jewish groups and congregations in Hong Kong to use it to its very limits for all sorts of activities. Starting with staying for dinner after services, it's quite likely that there will be a gradual increase in Club use as Reform Jews and others, over a period of time, come to feel comfortable and begin using it for other purposes as well.

In this small community of ours, we cannot afford the luxury of ignoring the majority to satisfy the interests of just a few. Further, the proposal to invite non-Jewish members to join instead of dealing with the primary needs of the majority will even further parochialize and distance The Club from those whose needs it was originally intended to serve.

Religious rights and worship facilities for members of Ohel Leah Synagogue are protected by the original 1903 Jacob Sassoon trust and the amended trust of 1986 and will always be respected. At the same time, we must also be guided by *hesed*, the Hebrew word I learned from Rabbi Lapian meaning "kindness" — the most important thing for us to know and practice as Jews, according to the Rabbi. As I have further read "The first words of any introduction to the Jewish daily way of life must speak of *hesed*, because we believe that Jewish religious faith and ritual observance aim, above all, to achieve a perfection of the human relationship and to create a better society." (*To Be a Jew*, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, Basic Books Inc., New York, 1972)

Fortunately, there is a great deal of understanding and sympathy for the Reform position among our Orthodox friends. As we approach the Annual General Meeting of Ohel Leah Synagogue and The Jewish Club in June, it is important that The UJC and Ohel Leah Synagogue members do what they can to help install leaders who have the larger interests of the community at heart. In fact, around 30 UJC members are also members of Ohel Leah Synagogue. As such, they are in a position to influence policies and operations of The Jewish Club by either running for office themselves or by voting for those candidates who support or endorse UJC positions.

With all due respect for the guidance we have received from our religious and community leaders, it is also very important that they are kept aware of community views. The responsibility in Jewish communities throughout history has always ultimately rested on the community members themselves to guide their affairs in what they see to be their own best interests. It is the silent majority among us who, to see this community prosper and show *hesed* to their fellow-Jews, must now make their views known through letters to our community leaders. As one Israeli member of our community told me a few days ago, "We hope there can be a big awakening." ■

The statement below was sent to The UJC by Rabbi Sam Joseph of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati who discovered it in the Temple bulletin of a congregation in Pittsburg.

I AM A REFORM JEW BECAUSE . . .

I am a Reform Jew because . . . of the freedom that Reform allows and indeed commands. It is no easy matter to deal with the responsibility of freedom. Freedom requires choices, and the believing Reform Jew makes those choices based upon knowledge. There is nothing within Jewish tradition that is inherently alien to Reform, and the right to choose has resulted in a Reform Jewish community of enormous diversity and richness in terms of both belief and ritual observance. We learn from one another, we respect one another, and frankly, we often attempt to influence one another's Jewish lifestyles. When all is said and done, however, we are joined under a common banner of intellectual freedom, a Jewish way of life that can accommodate the dictates of one's rational and spiritual self without external, uncompromising and unchangeable guidelines. I am a Reform Jew, then, not because I have rejected Orthodoxy, but because I have embraced Reform. I respect and honor those for whom an Orthodox or Conservative or Reconstructionist way of life brings meaning and self-fulfillment, but my Jewish aspirations and dreams find expression within the institutions of Reform Judaism in the most profound ways.

I am a Reform Jew because . . . Reform is inclusive rather than exclusive, prepared to reach out to the unaffiliated, to those who have come to Judaism through conversion, to those who currently hover on the periphery of Jewish life, starting where they are, rather than expecting them to approach what for many is an intimidating and strange new environment.

I am a Reform Jew because . . . of the absolute equality accorded to women within our ranks. Close to two decades after the ordination of the first woman within Reform, no other major movement has as yet extended the full range of rights and privileges in both the synagogue and religious spheres of Jewish life to fifty percent of our Jewish family.

I am a Reform Jew because . . . it cares for young people, through education, through youth groups, through camps, college programs and Israel opportunities, always encouraging, always holding out a vision and conveying a clear message that they can make a difference in the world.

I am a Reform Jew because . . . of Reform's passion for social justice, its fearless engagement with the great issues of our time, whether within the Jewish community or in society as a whole.

I am a Reform Jew because . . . the Reform Movement's compassion for the poor and helpless, it's historic role as the champion of those who have no champion, its readiness to bring those in need, whatever their religion, whatever their color, under the sheltering wings of a caring community.