

From the Rabbi's Study...

Exploring BCC and Judaism on the Web

Rabbi Lisa Edwards



PHOTO: KENNA LOVE

For those who are often casting about for the next interesting book or essay on something Jewish (or is that only me?), I want to recommend a few websites to you. (Sorry, Harriet and Sue, and any other BCCers who aren't on-line).

First of course is BCC's own newly re-designed website. Same address, www.bcc-la.org, but the site has a new look and new features. There is a rotating slide show showing the diversity and warmth of BCC's members. The calendar has been re-vamped and now reaches further into the future. You can read the BCC blog for latest updates and changes to events, subscribe to the RSS feed and you'll automatically receive any newly posted blog items (we promise not to overwhelm you). We'll continue to add text and features as we bring the site all the way up. More to be added there in the weeks to come, but check it out today if you haven't already.

A lot of newcomers arrive at BCC because of our website, and all of us can consult it for information from "who's on the bimah this week?" to "what is BCC's history?" Profound thanks to Davi Cheng and Emily Parkhurst who have been keeping our website alive and well for several years already. They paved the way. Many others have contributed already to our new revised website. We'll try to thank them all by name soon – I don't have the list – but a few thank yous now.

For early research and design and then for actually making it work, Howard Benenson and his PR firm, Benenson Janson Advertising, took on BCC as a pro bono project while Davi Cheng was still BCC's president. Working with Davi and then Brett and Felicia, Howard and his team researched and created a look for us. Many steps (and years) later, our High Holy Days cantor, Juval Porat, put on his other "kipa" for us, as a website designer, and got out a lot of the snags that had been holding us back from launching the new site.

Some day I hope BCC's website will contain as many links and options as a few organizations' websites I also

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Membership Has its Benefits

Brett Trueman, President



PHOTO: KENNA LOVE

This issue of G'vanim is being published just a few days after our annual new member Shabbat, when we honor those members joining BCC during the last year. While I'm writing this column prior to this special Shabbat, I know that there will be a lot of new members to be honored.

I've had the privilege of participating in four new member Shabbatot during my tenure as BCC president. Each time I've been excited to see all the new members welcomed into our community. Out of curiosity I did a rough count of the number of individuals who have joined BCC over this period. That number is over 55!

There are many reasons why people become members of BCC. Probably the most important is the BCC community. We are a community of warm, down-to-earth, and genuine people, where all can feel comfortable being themselves, no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they do. It's a community unlike virtually any other. And we are a community with the incredibly warm, smart, and spiritual Rabbi Lisa Edwards as our inspirational leader.

"We are a community of warm, down-to-earth, and genuine people, where all can feel comfortable being themselves, no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they do."

During the Days of Awe services in 2005 I extended an invitation to nonmembers to join BCC. I want to renew that invitation today. What I said then is just as true now:

"Sure, you don't have to join to get the more material benefits of BCC. You could continue to pay to attend our beautiful High Holiday services each year. You could attend our classes for a nominal fee. You can even come for free to our Friday night services.

"But, as a nonmember you can't get the intangible

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benefits of BCC, no matter how much you pay. You can't get that feeling of being part of a community, that feeling of belonging, that feeling of connectedness. Joining BCC is a transformative experience. Ask any of our members and they'll tell you the same thing.

"Come on now...try us out for a year. We think that you'll stay for life. But, first, try us out for a year. What do you have to lose? Just a year's worth of membership dues. But, think of all you have to gain...a feeling of community unlike anything else you've experienced before...a feeling of pride at being part of a historic community, the first GLBT synagogue in the world, that has accomplished so much in its brief history, that has blazed the trail for others to follow...a feeling that will last a lifetime. All that is worth a lot more than the money you'd pay in membership dues. Join us, so that you can experience what those who are already members of BCC have experienced. Join us so that we can welcome you as a member and so that we can grow stronger as a community."

As I mentioned then, and which is even truer now, the level of energy and enthusiasm within the doors of BCC is palpable. Our successful

capital campaign, our new building, our new religious school, our vibrant Women's, Men's, and 20s/30s Havurot, our Ruach Chayim and other innovative Shabbat services, and, of course, the multitude of weddings (!) – all that (and more) contribute to this sense of excitement.

If you haven't yet joined BCC, please consider becoming a member. Join with the rest of our membership to experience the sense of community that is BCC and to grow with us as we move proudly and enthusiastically into the future.

Please visit the membership page of our website (http://www.bcc-la.org/content/?page_id=24), to learn more about BCC and to download a membership application. After filling out the application, you can either send it to the BCC office or scan it into your computer and e-mail it to the office.

If you have any questions about membership, please feel free to e-mail our Membership Chair, Cecilia Quigley Groman (membership@bcc-la.org) or me (president@bcc-la.org).

I wish you all a healthy, happy, and prosperous secular New Year.

Kov tuv (all the best),
Brett

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Rabbi Lisa Edwards is available for private appointments. Please call at least a week in advance, if possible, to schedule.

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G' VANIM

G'vanim "Hues (of the rainbow)" is the monthly newsletter of

BETH CHAYIM CHADASHIM
6000 West Pico Blvd., L.A. CA 90035

Founded in 1972 as the world's first gay and lesbian synagogue, today BCC is an inclusive community of progressive lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and heterosexual Jews, our families, and friends. Everyone is welcome to attend weekly Friday evening services at 8:00 p.m.

Editor: Larry Nathenson. Graphics & Layout: Hilary Lentini. Articles submitted should be typed, emailed or attached as Word documents, and arrive by the 1st of the month preceding publication. To subscribe to G'vanim, send name and address and a check or money order for \$18 per year, attention: Subscriptions. Free to members.

BCC is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism, World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'avah and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.

encourage you to explore. One is www.JBooks.com "The Online Jewish Book Community." Ken Gordon, the editor of JBooks, sends out a regular e-mail – you can subscribe to it (no fee), and receive brief reviews, podcasts, etc. of books. For example, its December 1 newsletter included a link to the podcast of their exclusive interview with the late Studs Terkel, in which the interviewer got Terkel to talk about his Jewishness – secular – and what a strong influence it had on him.

I look forward every day (or at least the days I can spare a few minutes) to www.Nextbook.org "A new read on Jewish Culture." As their daily delivery into my e-mail inbox says, "Nextbook is a gateway to Jewish literature, culture & ideas." And their homepage reads: "nextbook: ('nekst-'buk) a Jewish cultural organization that produces an online magazine, publishes a book series, and presents events around the country." Filled with humor and insight (and frequent articles about gay Jews), it's hard to describe how good this website is, or how much fun to explore. Do try it, and let's hope their funders weren't investing with Bernard Madoff.

I also recommend three websites focused on queer Jewish matters. I am on the advisory boards for these wonderful organizations:

Hebrew Union College's Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation, www.huc.edu/ijs and its Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center, underwritten by our friends Rabbi Erwin (z"l) and Agnes Herman and named in memory of their son, Jeff Herman <http://elearning.huc.edu/jhvrc/>

Jewish Mosaic, www.jewishmosaic.org an equally rich website of the National Center for Sexual & Gender Diversity. Here's their description: "Jewish Mosaic partners with Jewish organizations, communities, and individuals of every denomination to create a world where all Jews are fully included in communal life, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity." But in fact sexual orientation and gender identity are what Jewish Mosaic focuses on.

And a brand new website, just launched in December, is another organization BCC partners with: TransTorah www.transtorah.org helps people of all genders to fully access and transform Jewish tradition, and helps Jewish communities to be welcoming sanctuaries for people of all genders.

I do hope you'll be able in 2009 to explore some of these wonderful resources. In fact, I hope together we'll be able to build on the varied and rich learning opportunities offered by each one.

L'shalom,
Lisa

SAVE THE DATE for the 2009 Humanitarian Awards Brunch

Get out your pencil and set aside Sunday, April 26, 2009 for this year's Humanitarian Awards Brunch (date is pending final confirmation of honorees at press time).

We are excited to announce that following up on last year's huge success Mark Farber will again be co-chairing the event. After three incredible years, Cecilia Quigley Groman will be stepping down as co-chair, but will bring her formidable talents to co-chairing the Silent Auction.

We can't wait to see you as we celebrate BCC at our biggest party of the year.

Free Ways to Help BCC Raise Much-Needed Funds

Every time you shop at any of 700+ online stores in the **iGive network**, a portion of the money you spend benefits Beth Chayim Chadashim. It's a free service, and you'll never pay more when you reach a store through iGive. In fact, smart shoppers will enjoy iGive's repository of coupons, free shipping deals, and sales. To get started, just create your free iGive account. And when you search the web, do it through iSearchiGive.com where each search means a penny (or more) for our cause!

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Juval Porat

Juval Porat Returns to BCC

We're delighted to welcome our High Holiday cantorial student, Juval Porat, back for a visit to BCC's bimah. As he finishes his semester at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, and prepares to return to Berlin to finish his cantorial studies, Juval will be making a detour to LA to visit his BCC friends. He and Rabbi Edwards will be leading services together on Friday night January 16. If we're lucky, we'll get Joe Hample up there too! Join us for a special oneg in Juval's honor, and an evening of beautiful music.

The Many Faces of Torah

PHOTO: BARRY WENDELL



There are seventy faces to the Torah. – Numbers Rabbah 13:15

Torah is everything to us: the story of our people, the basis of our

Jewish identity, the foundation of our spirituality, the proof that God loves us. It's also, frequently, a source of mystery and puzzlement, a resource whose meaning is hard to pinpoint.

This February I'll have the opportunity to present BCC with two very different sides of Torah. At 7 pm on Tuesday, February 3, I will teach a two-hour class inspired by my ordination thesis on Halachah of the Bizarre, i.e. Jewish law as it pertains to the impossible and the uncontrollable. What if a mouse brought bread crumbs into your home on Passover? What if two men with the same name wanted to divorce wives with the same name and the divorce documents got confused? What if you had a thousand guests at a dinner party, or ten thousand: would that change the wording of Birkat ha-Mazon (Grace After Meals)?

Believe it or not, the Talmud addresses these issues and many others of equal absurdity. Why did our sages concern themselves with such nonsense? What were they really trying to say? There is no simple answer, but we will explore several possibilities.

The following week, at our Shabbat service on February 13, we'll look at Torah from a completely different angle. On that date we will welcome the Yanov Torah, a scroll disassembled during World War II and smuggled piece by piece into a work camp near Lvov on the Polish-Ukrainian border, so Jewish prisoners could have access to Torah in some form. After the war, survivors stitched

Student Rabbi Joe Hample

the Torah back together and an immigrant brought it to America, where it was acquired by Rabbi Erwin Herman and his wife Agnes, early members and supporters of BCC for whom our annual Humanitarian Award is named.

Rabbi and Mrs. Herman wrote a book about the Yanov Torah, and promised to keep it moving from place to place so as many people as possible could see it and hear its colorful story. Rabbi Herman died last February and Hebrew Union College took on the task of continuing to circulate the scroll. As part of this project, rabbinic interns across the land will be bringing the Yanov Torah to their student pulpits in 2009.

After the scroll comes to BCC, the Hermans' beloved congregation, I'll write up our reaction to this unique Holocaust artifact, how we received it and what feelings it evoked. Our experience along with those of other student rabbis' congregations will be compiled into a volume for distribution when this leg of the Yanov Torah's travels is complete.

Like the Yanov Torah, each of us is on a distinctive Jewish itinerary that may take us almost anywhere. Torah with its many artful ambiguities provides the flexible template for our understanding of our Jewish quest. Please join me for these two Torah-related events which are sure to enrich our journey.

BCC Life Transitions Group

For the last six years, through the generosity of the Alan Balsam Fund, created by Stephen Schneider in blessed memory of Alan Balsam, BCC has sponsored the Life Transitions Group.

From a mere handful of people it has grown dramatically, essentially through word of mouth. This growth is primarily the result of friends and members of the congregation sharing the successes they are having through participation in the group. Members of the group are committed to helping each other grow by sharing experiences, strengths and hope in a caring and confidential environment.

If you are facing bereavement or challenges in relationships, family, health, career and life issues, you may want to consider learning more about the Life Transitions Group. Contact BCC's Office Manager, Victoria Delgadillo, by phone or email, and she will connect you with group facilitator Shirley Hirschberg to see if this group is right for you.

The group meets twice a month at BCC. Ms. Hirschberg is a social worker and lifestyle and bereavement facilitator at a variety of synagogues and other community institutions. The requested donation is \$10 for members and \$20 for non-members per session. No one is turned away for lack of funds. For more information please call the temple office at (323) 931-7023.

Ilene L. Cohen
ilene@me.com
310.800.5107

Story times with puppets and music for children.
Workshops for parents, teachers, and librarians.

BCC Men's Havurah in the New Year

Hey all you 50's Sci-Fi fans! Here's an opportunity you won't want to miss. On Saturday, January 24, at 7:00 pm, Mark Miller and Brett Trueman will host a screening of the 50's camp Sci-Fi flick, "Queen of Outer Space," which will be attended by the movie's co-star Lisa Davis! "Queen of Outer Space" stars Zsa Zsa Gabor as a rocket scientist, no less, and Ms. Davis will provide commentary and share behind-the-scenes gossip. A dessert reception will follow the screening. If you're a committed 50's Sci Fi fan (and we mean committed!) and would like to attend, please RSVP to Brett at president@bcc-la.org. Space is limited to 20 people, on a first come, first served basis (women too). This event is free of charge. Once you RSVP you will be notified of Mark's and Brett's address.

On Thursday January 29, join us for another shared event of the BCC's Men's and Women's Havurot. We will be having a Greek feast at Papa Cristo's at Pico and Normandy. No one will walk away hungry from this wonderful feast. The event starts at 6:30 pm with wine tasting, and then it will turn into an incredible feast complete with a few surprises. Dinner will run about \$25 per person. Please RSVP to the Temple office for this event.



PHOTO: AMELIA WEINMAN

Cecilia and Donna Quigley Groman

Sisters, there is so much more fun to have! In January we will have three events -- Sunday, January 18 morning at the Farmer's Market; Sunday, January 25 afternoon soiree at Hannah and Kenna's home in the Valley; and lastly we'll be joining the Men's Havurah for "My Big Fat Greek Family Style Dinner" on Thursday, January 29 at Papa Cristo's Greek Restaurant. Sorry about any New Year's resolutions made to lose weight this year. For February we have afternoon tea at Devora and Yael Green's home near BCC on Sunday, February 1; game night at BCC on Saturday, February 21; and a fabulous concert at the Getty Museum on Saturday night, February 28, featuring

Dennis Bogorad

In February 22, the Men's Havurah of BCC will dedicate a Sunday morning volunteering at Project Chicken Soup. This event will be followed with a no host brunch at Canter's Delicatessen.

On Sunday, March 22, BCC member Stephen Sass will be giving a bus tour of Historic and Contemporary Jewish Los Angeles, sponsored by the American Jewish University. The tour runs from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm and departs from the American Jewish University. Ticket price per person is \$45. Space is very limited, and is filling up fast. If you are interested in joining us, please email Dennis Bogorad at TVpug@pacbell.net. And plan to bring a brown-bag lunch!

Still in the planning stages for late winter and spring are a walking tour of the Watts Towers, a whale watching expedition, and an evening of bowling.



BCC Men's Havurah chair Dennis Bogorad (right) and partner Mark Apostolon

Women's Havurah Plans For the New Year

Donna Quigley Groman, Women's Havurah Chair

folk-rock singer-songwriter Martha Wainwright, daughter of Loudon Wainwright and Kate McGarrigle.

In December, a group of us attended a concert at LACMA, featuring Lucinda Carver, Harpsichordist. Then a bunch of us went to the movies on Xmas Day, followed by a Chinese dinner along with the Men's Havurah at Yang Chow restaurant in Chinatown.

2008 was a great year for the newly resurrected Women's Havurah. We're looking forward to another fabulous year. The truth is that we are a fun

bunch of gals who sometimes don't act our respective ages. And sometimes we even use poor grammar! What better way to relax than to spend time with your BCC sisters! If you haven't joined us yet, please give us a try. We really do go out of our way to include everyone in the fun.

For information on any of these events, or if you have a suggestion for an event, contact Women's Havurah two-legged chair: Mrs. Donna Quigley Groman at dlgroman@hotmail.com.

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Serving the gay community since 1984.

Beth Chayim Chadashim and JQ International, along with PFLAG LA and Kol Ami, are proud to co-sponsor Jeffrey Solomon's award winning solo play "Mother/SON" on January 19 and 20, 2009, at 8:00 pm at Celebration Theatre, 7051B Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles.

The performance on Tuesday, January 20 is a BCC and JQ International event and will be followed by a reception and post-show discussion with Mr. Solomon and members of the BCC community about coming out within a Jewish family context. If we have a group of 15 people or more we can receive a discounted ticket rate of \$15 (normally \$20). Please RSVP to Victoria at bcc@bcc-la.org, 323-931-7023, ext 203.

This play is a semi-autobiographical portrait of a young gay man and an opinionated woman--his mother. Both hilarious and heartfelt, this story traces her journey from rejection toward acceptance. A critical hit on both sides of the Atlantic, Emmy nominated writer-performer Jeffrey Solomon plays both mother and son in a performance Gay Chicago calls "Funny, poignant and appealing, a must-see!"

Here is a portion of an op-ed piece Mr. Solomon wrote regarding his evolving relationship with his mother and his family's first gay pride parade:

"I can't believe there are so many people," marveled my mother at the endless throng of gay humanity who had come from every corner of the globe to march past the United Nations that day. Suddenly, I was no longer a part of a despised minority, but of a special group of people - unique, artistic, and brave.

How we got to this day still seems like a miracle to me. Not that Mom was ever openly condemning of my "lifestyle." ("A lifestyle is wearing a nice summer hat and sipping daiquiris by the pool," I used to scold



Jeffrey Solomon

her. "Being gay is a life.") Nor did I ever really fear rejection, thank God. She just didn't "get it."

She took the news well enough, at least initially. We were sitting on the beach in my hometown of Niantic, Connecticut and she began to agitate for grandchildren. "Don't hold your breath," I scoffed. "What does that mean?" she shot back. "Are you a homosexual?"

And with a single nod, I walked through the door she had been brave enough to open, and ended seven years of silence, evasive maneuvers and emotional distance...

That day began our conversation. I use the singular, because while we had many talks about my sexuality, it was an ongoing process. She desperately trying to understand, and sometimes change, my gay identity. Me passionately trying to be understood, and sometimes resenting the need to justify my life.

"Explain it to me again," she would ask me, when I would give her news of some new love interest. "How do you actually know you're gay?" And I would heave a frustrating sigh, because no matter how many times

motherSON



I had tried to explain to her the instinctual nature of my innermost romantic feelings, here we were back at zero. Nothing in her experience told her that it was possible for me to have a happy, fulfilling life. Until I met Bill. And fell in love with him. And she saw

how happy I was. And she fell in love with him too. Suddenly, she understood. And I never had to explain again...

I came to understand how brave my mother was. She would have denied it herself, as she did with fierce determination at the Stonewall 25 parade when so many gays and lesbians hugged her and thanked her for her courage. "I'm not brave," she insisted. "If you love your children, this is what you do!"

But she was brave. In the conservative, heterosexual, largely blue-collar environment of New London, Connecticut she came out one day. Her friends were over for cards, and one of them, a retired Navy man, made one too many cruel, homophobic remarks about gays in the military. And my mother wept, because as she explained to me "when they say such things about you it hurts me so." And silence was no longer an option for her. She screamed at him, and stormed into her bedroom. When the dust cleared, her friends apologized to her, and they too began to have the conversation.

I think the most important thing I learned from my mother is that true pride is not marching with thousands down a street waving a banner, although that is certainly meaningful in its time and place. But real pride, I'm convinced, is having the guts to start the conversation even when it's scary or uncomfortable for you. And to never leave that conversation. Not for a moment.



BCC Provides Support in these Hard Times

Felicia Park-Rogers

Like a best friend, spouse, or beloved family member, BCC is here for you in good times and bad. When you have a birthday, anniversary, or special occasion to celebrate, we want to celebrate with you by listing your good news in one of our publications or having an



PHOTO: KENNA LOVE

oneg sponsored in your honor. In tough times our clergy and members are here to mourn with you, feed you, remind you of the sustenance of

prayer and laughter. In sickness and in health, someone at BCC is ready to be in community with you.

Here are some of the ways BCC is here for you and our community is here for each other during these uncertain and anxious financial times:

1. Socialize for free! Come to services, classes, havurah events, and yes, even Torah study. Don't stay at home. We have lots of free programs and services and pretty much always serve food (cookies are a major food group!). If there is a fee that you can't afford, send a note or place a call to me or Rabbi Lisa. We will discreetly and respectfully do what we can to help you participate.

2. Volunteer! Help out in the office, plan that event you've always wished to see at BCC, join a committee and help beef up your resume while you're between jobs. BCC is a great place to learn new skills or hone old ones. Organize a BCC group to help others in need: food banks and homeless shelters are experiencing huge increases in demand coupled with reductions of donations; let's work together to help others.

3. Network! Look through your new member directory. If there is someone in a field you're interested in, ask him or her if they can schedule an informational interview with you. BCC members take extra time to help each other. Not sure whom to speak with? Ask a Board member, clergy person, or staff person to help match you.

4. Get support! Join the Life Transitions Group. This group is led by a skilled facilitator. Schedule a time to talk with Rabbi Lisa. Talk with the L'Chayim Circle leaders about your financial planning and legacy, they have lots of practical support resources. Reach out to your friends here at BCC. If we're not here for each other, who is? Don't let pride or shame stand in the way; we're all been there at some point.

5. Start it! Want more? We can start a morning coffee klatch, Wednesday free matinee day, a

peer led job search support group, Saturday night game night...Let us know what sounds fun or useful to you and we'll support you to bring it into being—BCC is a space for members and our friends and supporters to make use of.

6. Don't close the door! It's common during hard times for people to maintain their synagogue membership even while cutting back in other areas because, well, because of all the support they receive. However, if finances are getting to the point where there are few options of what is left to cut, please call or email me. We are here for members during good times and bad. It is rare that an agreement can't be reached.

7. Help BCC help others! If you have stable income during these hard times, please consider making an extra donation to BCC to help offset decreases in donations and annual membership contributions. You can make donations to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund to help provide vital support for members in dire need. Make a note in your memo line.

Beth Chayim Chadashim is a kehilla kedosha, a sacred community. Together we will ride out this storm with love, compassion, and acts of loving kindness to each other and to others in our extended community.

Torah Study at the Beginning

Kadin Henningsen

In the beginning there is Bereshit. The Torah's first parshah is a long one and chock full of great stories like Creation, Adam and Eve in the Garden, and Cain and Abel. It's so exciting that this year our Torah study group decided it needs a few sessions of its own! Join us this January and February for an in depth exploration of Bereshit (Genesis 1:1-6:8). Just like Torah study (ongoing on Thursday evenings), everyone is welcome and no experience is necessary.

Tuesdays, January 13 and 27 and February 10 from 7:00-9:00 pm at BCC.

Teaching God to Children



How do we teach God to children? A challenging question when we adults are not always so comfortable ourselves talking

about God.

Yet thinking about God is natural and comfortable for most children. Young children especially have a sense of wonder and innate sensitivity to poetry that frees them from some of the limitations of rational thinking.

Teaching children about God is not the same thing as teaching children a particular belief in God. Nor does the teacher need to "believe" in God in order to teach about God. The teacher, whether a professional, parent or community member, need not feel that he or she holds the answer to the multitude of questions one could ask about God. Learning about God is an exploration. God means so many different things to so many different people. Even the same person may connect with one idea of God in one context, but with a different idea of God in another context.

Why is teaching God important? Because it is this concept of God that we as a people have invested with our wonder and our questions about the universe and about humanity. When we bring "God" into our lives in some way or another, we open ourselves to the wonders of the universe and the potential within humanity. When we teach God to children, we ask them to notice, explore and question the world around them. We teach them to name these feelings, ideas and concepts as God. In doing so, we provide a tool for understanding the texts of the Jewish past and present.

The most important reason that we need to teach God to children is so that they learn how open and fluid

we are allowed to be in our views of God. There are many versions of God that they will encounter in the world around them, in literature, in the language of others. We teach about God so that children can grow to own the language that they use about God, know why they themselves embrace or reject certain concepts of God and feel that no matter what they "believe" or do not "believe" there is a place for them in the Jewish community.

As adults we often feel pressure to provide answers to questions. When children ask us questions about God, our best response is to counter in a warm gentle voice, "Hmmm, good question. What do you think?" Most often the child is more interested in opening the discussion than in hearing a specific answer. Another acceptable response is "I don't know." For example, if a child asks you "Do you believe in God?" You need not answer yes or no, or try to evade the question with some philosophical treatise. You can

Leah Zimmerman, Education Director

simply say, "I think about it, I don't know, sometimes. How about you?" Most likely the child is more interested in hearing a response that allows her or him to continue thinking about God or a response that encourages forming opinions than knowing exactly what it is that you think and why.

Personally, I prefer to change the nature of the conversation from "belief in God" to a conversation about what God is. "I don't think about God as something to believe in or not believe in. I think about God as something that we experience, or feel. When people are connecting, taking care of each other, doing things together as a community, I feel God."

For me, being at Ohr Chayim on Shabbat morning, listening to the diverse responses to T'filah and Torah shared by our parents and students, that is a time when I feel God's presence. Please join us sometime on a Shabbat morning and see what wisdom you may learn.

BEAUTIFUL AND ENDEARING GIFT CARDS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT OUR SCHOOL

The children of BCC's religious school and family education program, Ohr Chayim, under the leadership of their teachers, have created lovely and touching greeting cards showcasing their art and Jewish learning in order to raise funds to help support their school. There is a display of the cards at the temple and on the BCC website. Please show your support for the learning of the next generation with your purchase! **Packets of eight unique cards are available for \$12** and you can purchase **three sets for \$30!** What a bargain (Have you bought a greeting card recently—they average \$4.00 each!). Thank you for supporting the children of BCC!

Pacific Southwest URJ Plans a Green Biennial

Press Release

The Pacific Southwest Council of the Union for Reform Judaism will hold its Biennial Convention at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Irvine, California, from February 6th to 8th. The title of the convention, "Living Judaism: Recharging Ourselves, Our Congregations and Our Planet," captures the greenness of this gathering. Registration will be paperless and online, several workshops on green issues will be offered and free grocery tote bags will be handed out to participants.

Among the highlights of the convention will be a visit by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, and Peter Weidhorn, the chairman of the URJ Board. Rabbi Yoffie will be meeting with synagogue presidents, studying with rabbis and cantors, and delivering a major address on Shabbat morning.

Mark Pelavin, the Associate Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, DC, will be the keynote speaker at the Sunday morning brunch. As the Biennial takes place two weeks after the inauguration of the new

president and his administration, Pelavin, a Washington insider, will speak on "A Post-Inaugural Analysis."

Two world-class scholars, Dr. Mark Washofsky and Dr. David Kaufman, will teach at the Biennial. Washofsky, the Solomon B. Freehof Professor of Jewish Law and Practice at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, will teach an all-day study kallah on Friday, February 6th, and will offer several other sessions on Saturday. Kaufman, the Associate Professor of Contemporary American Jewish Studies at HUC-JIR Los Angeles, will be the keynoter at Friday's lunch on the topic "Lincoln and the Jews: On the 200th Anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Birth." Kaufman will also teach on "Jews and the '60s" and "The History of the Synagogue in America."

On Saturday night a hot new group from Santa Barbara will perform, SoulAviv. They have been described as: "High energy soul, gospel, and world-music grooves meet Jewish heritage, spirituality, and celebration." This is Jewish music as you have never heard it before.

Find out why hundreds of synagogue leaders – clergy and staff, lay leaders, and involved members alike – were so happy at previous conventions. Share the Biennial highlights they had:

- Shabbat services that were beautiful davening experiences: spiritual and uplifting, innovative and exciting, and filled with ruach;
- Stimulating and exciting speakers and down-to-earth workshops that gave participants new ideas for practical action;
- The camaraderie of connecting and reconnecting with leaders from other congregations and the opportunity to discuss issues of common concern;
- Networking with North American and regional staff and learning about resources available from the Union for Reform Judaism; and
- Fabulous entertainment.

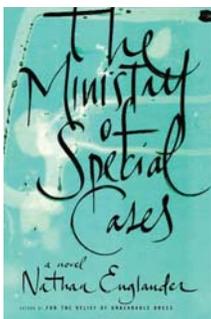
Mark your calendars! Get ready to be part of the special energy and the amazing experience that is Biennial! Go to www.urj.org/psw and register for this powerful event!

BCC Book Group

Larry Nathenson

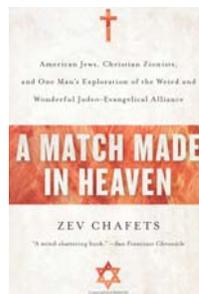
For over ten years, BCC members and friends have gathered in private homes for monthly potluck brunches and discussion of books selected by the group. Fiction and non-fiction, historical and contemporary, American and Israeli, the books read by the group include something for everyone's tastes and interests. We welcome new members to the group, as well as occasional visitors who may be interested in discussing a particular book.

Our next two book discussions are:



Sunday, January 25, at 10:00 a.m.
The Ministry of Special Cases, by Nathan Englander

This novel is set in Argentina in the 1970s during the so-called "dirty war" by the country's military dictatorship against leftist dissidents, many of whom were Jewish, and chronicles the struggles of a Jewish family during that dark chapter of the country's history.



Sunday, February 22, at 10:00 a.m.
A Match Made in Heaven, by Zev Chafets

An analysis by an American-Israeli journalist of the often uncomfortable relationship between American Jews and Evangelical Christians who support Israel for their own theological reasons, with anecdotes taken from both American and Israeli political life.

BCC members and non-members alike are invited to attend. Because the discussions are held in members' homes, space is limited. Please RSVP to the BCC office early to guarantee your seat at the table, or contact Larry Nathenson at Larrynath@aol.com.

Mazel Tov

Please join the whole BCC community in wishing the following members a big "Mazel Tov" on their recent good news.

Sylvia Sukop, who has been awarded a 2009 Rosenthal Fellowship through PEN USA's Emerging Voices program, an intensive eight month program, national in scope but based here in Los Angeles, and designed to support writers in the early stages of their literary careers.

Gordon Blitz, on receiving the "Values in Action" award by his employer, Catholic Healthcare West, for good work by an employee during the past year. Gordon's mother and husband, Neal Wiener, made a surprise appearance when he received the award, and he received a hearty applause when he announced his recent marriage to Neal.

Melissa Minkin, for receiving National Board Certification as a teacher after a rigorous and demanding process. She had to submit videotapes of her teaching, a portfolio and written analysis of her work with students, and take a six-part test. Being a National Board Certified Teacher is the highest certification a classroom teacher can achieve, and essentially identifies her as a master teacher within the profession.

Herb Toplan, on being offered a position at Hilton Hotels Corporate Office in Beverly Hills to work for their new division, the Luxury and Lifestyle Brand, as a Senior Manager starting December 15. Herb will be working to develop the training and culture programs for each of these brands and rolling them out to domestic and international hotels. He struggled with his choice to leave his job running a summer camp, but hopes his new position will help him develop skills he would need to fulfill his dream of opening his own summer camp someday.

Gavriella Ruit, on her new home.

Bracha Yael Cheng, on being named (upon the nomination of Rabbi Lisa Edwards) as one of the Jewish Journal's Top 10 Mensches of 2008, for her many accomplishments, including her pioneering Telephone Minyan and Telephone Torah Study programs. BCC is very proud to have a Top 10 Mensch for a second year in a row (Allison Diamant was named last year).

Rabbi Lisa Edwards, on being selected (again!) as one of the regular Torah commentators for the Jewish Journal.

Rachel Timoner, BCC honorary member and partner of **Felicia Park-Rogers**, and **Rachel Kobrin**, former BCC Tot Shabbat and Torah Study teacher, on their publication in the December issue of the interdenominational Eilu V'eilu answering the question "What are the greatest challenges you believe you will face in the first five years in your rabbinate?"

Please send your good news to the BCC office. We want to celebrate with you!

BCC to Co-Sponsor The Equality Summit

Saturday, January 24 • 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. • Los Angeles Convention Center

The passage of Proposition 8 was a terrible blow to the fight for civil rights of LGBT people. Despite the disappointing results, the outpouring of energy and activism both during and after the election has been a silver lining. Now it is important to for everyone who cares about this issue to harness our energy and focus on next steps.

The Equality Summit is a statewide gathering of community leaders and activists committed to winning back marriage equality in California to network, share information and resources, and plan next steps. It is open to self-identified community leaders, including new and emerging leaders, actively working to win back marriage equality. Because of space limitations, organizations are encouraged to send no more than two representatives.

Goals of the Equality Summit

- To be inclusive of the entire coalition of people working for marriage equality, particularly reaching out to communities of color, people of faith, and straight allies.
- To build and strengthen relationships, so that affinity groups and working partnerships can form and thrive.
- To develop trust and create healing from the pain of electoral defeat and its aftermath.
- To disseminate information about what happened on the campaign, and what is currently happening in the movement.
- To nurture new leaders and organizations.
- To create space for activists and leaders to plan next steps and move forward with new projects in partnership.

January 2009

Tevet/Shevat 5769

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p><i>All events at BCC unless otherwise noted*</i></p> </div>				1 HAPPY SECULAR NEW YEAR No Torah study	2 6:30 pm Thai House Dinner 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Cara Hanes Herb Toplan	3 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 12:00 pm Family Shabbat
4 8:00 am (cook) 11:30 am (deliver) Project Chicken Soup 330 N. Fairfax	5	6	7	8 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	9 6:30 pm Telephone Service 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Edwards Davi Cheng	10 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 11:00 am Project Caring Country Villa Wilshire 855 N. Fairfax 12:00 pm Family Shabbat
11	12	13 7:00 pm Bereshit (Genesis) Study Group (see page 7)	14 7:00 pm Executive Committee Meeting	15 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	16 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Edwards Guest Cantorial Student Juval Porat	17 10:00 am Shabbat Morning Service and Dairy Potluck
18 9:00 am Women's Havurah at Farmer's Market	19 MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY (BCC closed)	20 8:00 pm Mother/SON Celebration Theatre BCC Co-sponsor (see page 6)	21	22 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	23 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Student Rabbi Joe Hample Robin Berkovitz	24 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 12:00 pm Family Shabbat 8:00 pm Men's Havurah SciFi film (private home)
25 8:00 am (cook), 11:30 am (deliver) Project Chicken Soup 10:00 am BCC Book Group <i>Ministry of Special Cases</i> (private home) 2:00 pm Women's Havurah Soiree (private home)	26	27 7:00 pm Bereshit (Genesis) Study Group	28 7:00 pm Board of Directors Meeting	29 4:00 pm Telephone Study 6:30 pm Men's and Women's Havurah Dinner Papa Christo's 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	30 Ruach Chayim 7:00 pm Refreshments and Schmooze 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Edwards Guest Musicians	31 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 12:00 pm Family Shabbat

February 2009

Shevat/Adar 5769

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 8:00 am (cook) 11:30 am (deliver) Project Chicken Soup 330 N. Fairfax 2:00 pm Women's Havurah Afternoon tea (private home)	2	3 7:00 pm Class Halacha of the Bizarre Student Rabbi Joe Hample (see page 4)	4	5 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	6 UAHC Biennial Begins (Irvine) 6:30 pm Thai House Dinner 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Cecilia Quigley Elissa Barrett	7 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 12:00 pm Family Shabbat
8	9 TU B'SHEVAT (New Year for Trees)	10 7:00 pm Bereshit (Genesis) Study Group (see page 7)	11 7:00 pm Executive Committee Meeting	12 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	13 6:30 pm Telephone Service 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Student Rabbi Joe Hample Eric Kamm Yanov Torah (page 4)	14 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 11:00 am Project Caring Country Villa Wilshire 12:00 Family Shabbat
15	16 PRESIDENTS' DAY BCC Office Closed	17	18	19 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	20 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Edwards Guest Cantor Ethan Bair	21 10:00 am Shabbat Morning Service and Dairy Potluck 7:00 pm Women's Havurah Game night
22 8:00 am (cook), 11:30 am (deliver) Project Chicken Soup 10:00 am BCC Book Group <i>A Match Made in Heaven</i> (private home)	23	24	25 7:00 pm Board of Directors Meeting	26 4:00 pm Telephone Torah Study 7:00 pm Torah Study Rabbi Edwards	27 Ruach Chayim 7:00 pm Refreshments and Schmooze 8:00 pm Shabbat Service Rabbi Edwards Guest Musicians	28 10:00 am Ohr Chayim 12:00 pm Family Shabbat 8:00 pm Women's Havurah Martha Wainwright Concert at Getty Museum