



THE JWC NEW MOON

Tishri 5767

September 2006

Not Your Grandmother's Mikvah: 5767 Program Theme #1

by Malke Frank

Feminist Jewish women in the latter part of the last century began to look again at traditional rituals and ask ourselves how we might re-embrace such rituals in a way that is meaningful to us. One part of our Rosh Hodesh programming for the coming year will be a focus on the mikvah.

Mikvah or *mikveh*, as it is also sometimes spelled, is a ritual bath used for immersion. Historically, the mikvah was used by both men and women for a variety of purposes. Everyone was required to go to the mikvah after coming in contact with the dead before they could enter the Tem-



ple area again. Nazirites were required to immerse in the mikvah upon completing their vows; lepers, when they were healed; priests, before performing certain Temple rites; men, after having a noctur-

nal emission; women, after childbirth or menstruation. Ancient *mikvaot* (plural of mikvah) dating from Temple times (predating 70 C.E.) can be found throughout Israel.

Today, the mikvah is used primarily by Jewish, mainly Orthodox, women after menstruation, childbirth, and before the day of their wedding, as a key practice in the maintenance of the laws of "family purity." In addition, there is a separate mikvah for vessels and utensils used for food since, in Orthodox practice, such items must be immersed before use if they were purchased from a non-Jew. Converts from all streams of Judaism also immerse themselves in the mikvah as part of their conversion process.

Until recently, for the liberal woman, the mikvah has not been a part of her Jewish experience. Presently, however, the mikvah is undergoing a personality change. Or rather, people in the non-Orthodox community are viewing the mikvah from a different perspective, with the result being that a growing number of Jewish women and men are finding deep meaning in the ancient well-spring. In contemporary life, the mikvah is becoming the

source of spiritual, physical, and emotional renewal after life events such as divorce, miscarriage, and rape, or after surviving breast cancer or domestic violence. The healing effect of mikvah, especially for women, is receiving renewed attention.

This past June in Boston, an historic conference was held. Entitled *Reclaiming Mikveh*, it brought together for the first time educators, academics, rabbis, and leaders from across the country who participated in workshops, study sessions, and discussions which focused on an in-depth examination of the mikvah and its contemporary possibilities, including new uses and new rituals. Boston's newly built Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and Education Center bears witness to this new phenomenon.

Rabbi Sharyn Henry will facilitate our 3-part mikvah study. The first program on January 18 will focus on text materials about mikvah, and on March 19, we will create a ritual for our own mikvah experience which will be on May 20, at which time we will have a group immersion.

Check out the Mayyim Hayyim website at:

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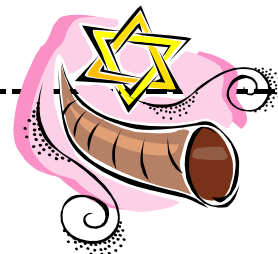
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Highlights:

- New mikvah rituals
- Women's issues in Israel
- Tzedakah updates
- 5767 dues due

www.mayyimhayyim.org

for more information about contemporary uses of mikvah. And be sure to join us on January 18, March 19 and May 20, 2007, as we learn about the historic basis of mikvah and think about what contemporary mikvah might mean for us.



JWC Program Year for 5767 (2006-07)

EVENT	DATE	TIME	PLACE	TOPIC
Tashlich/Shalechet	Sun 9/17	2PM	Chatham Pond	Casting off the obsolete
Sukkot	Sun 10/8	5PM	Member's home ¹	Potluck and plant exchange
Fall Shabbaton & Cheshvan	Sat 10/28	10AM-havdalah (~7:30PM)	Member's home	Rosh Hodesh celebration and <i>Parashat Mishpatim</i> study
RH ² Kislev	Tues 11/21	7:30 PM	LZC ³	Jewish Women's Writings & dessert
RH Tevet	Th 12/21	7:30 PM	LZC	Hanukkah and <i>Parashat Mishpatim</i> study
RH Shvat	Th 1/18	7:30 PM	LZC	<u>Mikvah #1</u> : Text study with Rabbi Sharyn Henry
Women's Shabbat & RH Adar	Sat 2/17	10AM	LZC	"Torah Alive!"—Storahelling for <i>Parashat Mishpatim</i>
Ta'anit Esther	Th 3/1	4PM	Miryam's Shelter & Local restaurant TBD	"Food makes us stronger": social action & get-together
RH Nisan	Mon 3/19	7:30PM	LZC	<u>Mikvah #2</u> : Creating new ritual with Rabbi Sharyn Henry
Women's Pesach Seder	Sun 4/8	6PM	LZC	
RH Iyar/Annual Meeting	Wed 4/18	7:30PM	Member's home	Screening and discussion of short film "The Tribe"
RH Sivan	Sun 5/20	TBD	Community mikvah	<u>Mikvah #3</u> : Immersion Facilitator: Rabbi Sharyn Henry
RH Tammuz	Sun 6/17	—	Your home	DIFY ⁴
RH Av	Mon 7/16	—	Your home	DIFY
RH Elul	Sun 8/12	11AM	Member's home	Family potluck brunch

¹An e-mail will be sent out prior to events in members' homes giving the exact address.

²"RH" indicates a Rosh Hodesh—celebration of the new moon or new month

³The Labor Zionist Center (LZC) is located at 6328 Forbes Avenue in Squirrel Hill.

⁴"DIFY" indicates Do-It-For-Yourself: a Rosh Hodesh ritual and thoughts for contemplation will be e-mailed in advance.

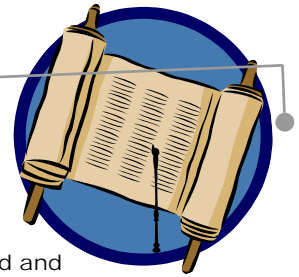
Support the JWC with your 5767 dues:

\$18 _____ \$36 Regular membership _____ \$50 Family membership _____ \$100 Sustaining membership _____

I am adding \$_____ to my dues for this year's tzedakah project, the Israel Women's Network (see p. 4).

Mail your check to: JWC, P.O. Box 81924, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

5767 Program Theme #2: Storahtelling



For the past six years, the JWC together with the Temple Sinai Rosh Hodesh group have organized and shared together a Women's Shabbat Service. Despite our fondness for this tradition, this year we have decided to try something different--a **Storahtelling Service** that will take place on February 17, 2007.

Storahtelling represents a pioneering way of reclaiming the heritage of sacred and dynamic Jewish storytelling through the incorporation of music, drama, and simultaneous translation of the Torah text.¹

Founded in 1998 by Amichai Lau-Lavie, Storahtelling's primary focus is the revitalization of the traditional Torah Reading Service and the revival of the ancient craft of interpretive translation. The Reading of Torah is one of the world's oldest forms of ritual storytelling still in practice. It has been performed weekly for over two millennia in synagogues across the world. Historically, the Hebrew chanting was accompanied by live translation in the local vernacular, provided by the *mturgeman* (a translator/commentator), increasing both comprehension and contemporary relevance.

The Reading of Torah once functioned as the central opportunity for education in the Jewish community. Around one thousand years ago, this art form that can be seen as a treasure of our Jewish heritage, began to fade out of synagogue practice. Although still performed weekly, the ritual has lost much of its historic vitality. By incorporating innovative translations, dramatic commentary, and live music into the weekly reading, Storahtelling brings the Torah front and center once again as an inspiring and creative part of Jewish life.

*"Full of drama, ancient wisdom and suspense, Storahtelling is a revolutionary approach to Judaism."
(Jewish Journal, LA)*

Anyone can be a storateller. All that is necessary is a familiarity with the Torah text and the willingness to think outside the *bima* box in order to make the text come alive.

The Torah portion we will be telling at our February 17th service is parashat Mishpatim (Exodus 21:1 to 24:18). We will have several opportunities earlier in our programming year to prepare for the Storahtelling service by becoming acquainted with parashat Mishpatim. The first opportunity will take place on Saturday, October 28 during our annual all-day autumn Shabbaton.

Accompanied by great food and a before-or-after dip in the hot tub, we will begin our study of Mishpatim. Our own Julie Newman will introduce us to the concept of Storahtelling and we will begin to think about how Mishpatim might speak to us. On December 12, as part of our Rosh Hodesh Tevet and Hanukkah program, we will continue our study of Mishpatim and finish our planning for the Shabbat Storahtelling on February 17.

We invite you to be a part of this exciting hands-on experience with Torah. To get a sneak preview of parashat Mishpatim, go to the website <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00old> and then click on the relevant Exodus chapters for a full text of the parasha.

[¹Information in this section is adapted from Storahtelling website: www.storahtelling.org.]

Tzedakah Update:

5765 (2004-05) Project: Haifa Women's Crisis Shelter

5766 (2005-06) Project: Jewish Women International Domestic Violence Library in Pittsburgh

The JWC raised \$450 for tzedakah last year. In a recent discussion with a leader of the Domestic Violence Library Project, this past year's project, we learned that the library initiative has been put on hold as the local Jewish Women International chapter focuses their efforts on other aspects of addressing DV in the Pittsburgh Jewish community. The JWC board, at its July 2006 meeting, decided to donate \$100 of the collected tzedakah funds to the JWI to help sponsor their second community-wide domestic violence conference, to be held on October 22, 2006. We also agreed to donate the remaining 5766 tzedakah funds to our previous year's project: the Haifa Women's Crisis Shelter. Shortly after the board decision, the war with Hezbollah began, with Haifa sustaining... [cont'd p. 4]

JWC Tzedakah Project 5766 (2006-07)



This year's tzedakah project is the Israel Women's Network and, specifically, their work to address the sexual trafficking of women in Israel (see related article on page 5). The IWN is Israel's foremost advocacy group for women's rights. IWN is a non-partisan organization of women united in their determination to improve the status of women in Israel, despite differing political opinions, religious outlooks and ethnic origins. IWN was established as a non-profit voluntary body in 1984 by a group of women professionals.

IWN seeks to change the social context and norms that prevent women from assuming their rightful place as equal partners in a just and democratic society. Equal rights between the sexes are enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence and supported by extensive legislation – and IWN played a significant part in the passage of such legislation. However, major discriminative practices against women persist in nearly every sphere of life (the workplace, the Israel Defense Force, religious courts, health services and educational establishments). IWN's mission and work is multi-faceted and includes education, advocacy, empowerment training for marginalized women and efforts to achieve equality for women of all ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds which the IWN sees as a precondition for the establishment of a just and productive society.

IWN's focus on sexual trafficking in Israel:

The IWN initiated the first study on the phenomenon of trafficking of women in Israel in 1997. It was one of the founders of the coalition against the trafficking of women and continues to work in that framework today. The coalition against the trafficking of women includes a number of human-rights organizations and individuals who have taken upon themselves to work together to eradicate the phenomenon of trafficking of women and to look after and take care of the women who have been trafficked into the sex industry in Israel. The coalition believes it is the responsibility of the State of Israel to take care of the victims of such trafficking and has made specific recommendations to the State of Israel to address this problem.

"The [U.S.] State Department has put Israel on a special 'watch list,' citing its 'failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to address trafficking' in human beings."
(The Forward: June 9, 2006)

The IWN played a major role in promoting an amendment to the Israeli criminal code banning trafficking in women. However, currently, when a woman is found to be a victim of trafficking, she is detained, often in prison, while waiting to testify against alleged traffickers. The IWN lobbies for legislation that calls for state-provided safe shelters to allow the women to remain in Israel under humane conditions while waiting to testify against a trafficker.

All tzedakah monies collected by the JWC this year will go to the IWN to support their work on this important issue.

[Tzedakah Update—cont'd from p. 3] ...major damage. The board received a letter from Dina Hevlin Dahan, the resource development coordinator of the Haifa Women's Crisis Center, in early August that said, in part:

"These days, we at the HWCS find a double meaning in the word "shelter". During the first week of the war, under rockets' attacks, the traumatized and energetic children residing at the Shelter started to act like robots. They were very disciplined, and every rocket's alarm sent them directly to the Shelter's bomb shelter. After over a week under rockets' attacks, the Shelter's staff found out that the Shelter was no longer a safe haven for battered women and their children, and that for their sake they should move to an appropriate temporary place to stay. The Shelter's staff is busy visiting women and children in shelters all over Israel and trying to support them despite the situation. All women expressed their will to come back to our Shelter, when it is safe again."

We hope you agree that sending additional funds to the Haifa Women's Crisis Center makes sense at this difficult time.

Sexual Trafficking of Women in Israel

by Lisa Brush

In the global sex trade, the multi-billion dollar industry in which women's and girls' bodies and sexual access are bought and sold, Israel is both a destination country and a transit country. There are no official numbers regarding the extent of prostitution and the traffic of women in Israel, but there is a general consensus that it is becoming more prevalent (*CEDAW Report*, 8 April 1997). Traffickers and pimps earned US\$50,000 - 100,000 a year from each prostituted woman, resulting in a US\$450 million sex industry ("A modern form of slavery," *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 January 1998).

The international sex trade thrives on inequality, especially on political and economic disparities between women and men and between countries. Globalization - including rapidly expanding transnational markets in labor, good and services, financial capital, and the like - heightens economic disparities and aggravates inequality, especially between women and men.

Prostitution, "exotic dancing" (performing feminine sexual accessibility for cash wearing a g-string

and 8-inch heels), pornography, and other forms of commercial trafficking in the bodies and sexuality of women and girls are sustained by coercion, torture, rape, and systematic violence as well as poverty and inequality.

Circuits of trafficking operate from Central and Eastern Europe into Western Europe; currently, women from Russia are particularly at risk for being lured into the Israeli sex trade under false pretences (with promises of jobs or legal immigrant status). There has been a steady increase in the numbers of foreign women involved in prostitution who are arrested for illegal stays in Israel and who are detained before being deported to their home-countries (Authorities, Neve Tirza women's prison, *CEDAW Report*, 8 April 1997).

The non-profit Israel Women's Network estimates that 70% of the approximately 10,000 prostituted women in Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial center, come from the former Soviet republics, and that about 1,000 women are brought into Israel illegally each year (*CEDAW Report*, 8 April 1997). A poll by the Women's Network showed 44% of Israelis believed all Russian immigrant women provided sexual

services for pay. Illegal immigrants in Israel, who are mostly Russian, are often stereotyped as having brought crime and prostitution while exploiting Israeli laws enabling anyone with a Jewish grandparent to immigrate (Elisabeth Eaves, "Israel not the promised land for Russian sex slaves," *Reuters*, 23 August 1998).

The JWC *tzedakah* (giving for social justice) project for the coming year will raise funds for the anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution activities of the Israel Women's Network, which conducts advocacy, litigation, research, public education, and training to improve women's rights and status in Israel. IWN deals with the full range of issues confronting women in Israel and is the country's foremost advocacy group for women's rights.

Sources:

Joni Seager, [The Penguin atlas of women in the world](#) (Revised ed., 2003), pp. 56-57.

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women: (<http://www.catwinternational.org/factbook/Israel.php>)

New Israel Fund: (<http://www.nif.org/>)

To contribute to our 5767 project, include tzedakah with your dues or send it to the address on the back cover.

Rosh Hodesh Elul:

On Sunday, August 20, 2006, the Jewish Women's Center gathered at the home of Barbara Baumann and Howard Aizenstein for our Rosh Hodesh Elul family brunch. We enjoyed the last-days-of-summer outside. Kids of all ages, men included, played baseball while the womenfolk discussed gardening and the comparative virtues of Whole Foods vs. Giant Eagle and the effect on both with the advent of Trader Joe's. Everyone stopped long enough to eat. A blast of the shofar returned us (as it is supposed to do!) to a focus on the new month. We celebrated Rosh Hodesh Elul with readings, blessings, and wine. A "homework" page was included with questions for personal reflection and introspection in preparation for the New Year.



Celebrating Elul

Member News



What's new?

Mazal tov to *Larissa Myaskovsky* and Russell Goldstein who welcomed Ephram Chayim to their family on August 2, 2006. Ephram weighed 8 lbs. and was 20 3/4 inches long. He is "absolutely adorable" says his totally unbiased mother!

Judith Lantos-Finkelstein writes: Often I overlook turning in news for the JWC newsletter. But not this time. My husband and I were in Israel in June. We toured with UJF Federation's Mission...quite a few individuals from western PA were part of the tour. We visited the Land from the extreme north to Beersheva. It was an additional treat for me, because our tour was very close to the visit to Israel that I had made in the 1980's. What a treat to see some of the remarkable changes in land development, new housing for newcomers, and many other "firsts". When we arrived in Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, a flood of memories came back to me. And our experience at the WALL brought back not only the trip in the 1980's but a tour I had made with my children in the 1990's. We had the wonderful opportunity to spend time with one of the Federation's projects dealing with the settlement of Ethiopian Jews. We met some of the new settlers and were allowed to spend personal time with the children on that Kibbutz. Looking back on that visit, it is hard to now see the daily news of Israel at war, of Israel shoved to the front of Middle Eastern events and Israel's future again filled with war and trauma. Each day I pray for peace in Israel.

Marian Hershman writes: I just returned from 2 weeks at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. It is not the one that Pittsburgh kids go to—they go to Ramah in Canada. I have been a camp nurse for more than 25 years, but I never had an experience like this one.

First of all, it's the first time I've been there for several years due to illness and other family happenings. I was sure that the hills got steeper, but I was assured that they didn't!

The population of Ramah Berkshires comes from New York, New Jersey, and Long Island. We, here in Pittsburgh, do not realize the impact that 9/11 had on many families. How do you deal with a kid who tells you his mother died at the World Trade Center????

Mazal tov to *Sydelle Pearl* who announces that her children's book entitled Books for Children of the World: The Story of Jella Lepman will be published in the spring of 2007 by the Pelican Publishing Company. The book tells the true story of how a Jewish woman fled her native Germany during World War II but returned to establish the International Youth Library in Munich after the war because she believed that children's books in different languages could serve as ambassadors of peace. Her legacy continues to this very day. Sydelle will be interested to speak in schools once the book is published. If anyone has any ideas, please contact Sydelle at pearldell@hotmail.com.

There's another book in the JWC family. *Malke Frank's* husband Ivan has published his newest book, Not From My Lesson Plans, via Gifted Education Press. It's available on amazon.com. Ivan will be signing books at the Monroeville Borders on October 14th at 2PM and there will be a review in the *Jewish Chronicle* soon. Congrats, Ivan!

Several members of the JWC, *Malke Frank, Pat Cluss, Nancy Levine, Laura Horowitz, and Judy Grumet*, are involved in the creation of the New Community Chevra Kaddisha, a group dedicated to performing the mitzvah of *tahara*, preparation of the bodies of Jewish deceased for burial. This group is open to any member of the Jewish community who is interested in performing this act of "final kindness." Call Malke (412 422-8044) if you want more information.

We were sorry to hear about the passing in April of Melissa Jones' mother, Rita Conn, of Montreal, Canada. Our sympathies go out to Melissa and her family.

We like to know what is happening with our members. Call Pat Cluss (412) 421-2219 with your news or e-mail us at jwcpgh@yahoo.com.

We like to reprint articles published elsewhere about Jewish women, past and present who are making / have made a difference for women. Zehava Galon heads the Committee Against Trade in Women in Israel.

Zehava Galon: Advocating Tirelessly for Women

By Ruth Mason

Reprinted with permission from the author and Jewish Women, published quarterly by Jewish Women International

The Hon. Zehava Galon adores her job. And her job is nothing less than changing the world—one law at a time. "I see my job as a mission," says the traditional-looking member



of Israel's Knesset with the untraditional views. "It fulfills a need I have to struggle for justice and equality. I love every aspect of my work,

from drafting laws to giving interviews, to making a speech on the Knesset podium, to meeting people who come to see me. The other day, a group of battered women came in to tell me that a law we had passed wasn't being implemented. You should have seen what I did here in 45 minutes. I turned the world upside down."

Even though Galon is the first-ever female head of a Knesset faction (Meretz-Yachad, with 10 seats), she has an impressive record of laws passed and was a founder of the human rights watchdog organization B'Tselem (which received the Carter-Menil Human Rights Prize), when asked what accomplishment she is most proud of, she says without hesitation, "my two sons."

"It's not easy growing up in a house in which the mother is so committed and involved, so busy," Galon says. "We all paid a price. When my sons were small, I was jailed for five days for staging a protest in a closed military zone. Try explaining to a child that his mom is an *ideological* criminal. It was very hard."

Inspired by hearing former MK Shulamith Aloni speak when she was 15, Galon developed a radical political consciousness early on, believing

that Israel should leave the West Bank and Gaza and reach an accord with the Palestinians. A protest she led outside the one movie theater in Petah Tikva, where she grew up and still lives, led to the theater's opening on Shabbat and served as a symbol for the struggle to separate church and state in Israel. Eventually, she became secretary general of Aloni's civil rights party Ratz (a forerunner of Meretz)—the first woman to hold such a position since Golda Meir.

A dynamo of energy with a calm demeanor, Galon is renowned for her record on women's issues and human rights. (*Haaretz's* Gideon Levy called her the "Knesset guardian of human rights," and the *Jerusalem Post Magazine* entitled a cover article

abusive husbands; give women leaving battered-women's shelters financial assistance to help them start new lives; and require the representation of women in all sports organizations. She also initiated the opening of two centers in hospital emergency rooms to treat sexual-assault victims.

It was Galon who encouraged an aggrieved former defense ministry employee to bring charges of sexual assault against Transportation Minister Yitzhak Mordechai. (He was convicted.) "Perhaps what most characterizes me," she says, "is the willingness to speak my truth, even when it's an unpopular one."

It is unusual for a woman to be a member of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, but Galon insisted on it. A strong voice against Palestinian house demolitions, she believes that entire families should not be made to suffer for the crimes of individual members.

Galon strives for balance in her life, though she admits she doesn't always succeed. "Some days I find myself exhausted from all the travel, the pressure, the struggle to influence, the need to answer dozens of calls and letters from the public every day [she answers her own phone and responds to every letter]...and it's important for me to look nice and to dress nicely, so I have to find time to go to the hairdresser."

Her biggest hope? "That there will be peace here—and I believe it will happen. Then we will have time to address critical issues like education and the environment."

Zehava Galon heads the Committee Against Trade in Women that showed how women are smuggled across the Egyptian border into Israel and "along the way [are] raped, beaten and then sold in public auctions." Galon presented the committee's report to the Knesset in March 2005.
—Quote from Zehava Galon via the Associated Press

about her "Rebel Without a Pause.") As head of the Parliamentary Enquiry Committee on Trafficking in Women, she has initiated laws against human trafficking and persuaded the government to treat these women as victims rather than criminals.

She has passed many other laws safeguarding women's rights, including ones that provide mandatory prison terms for sexual offenders and

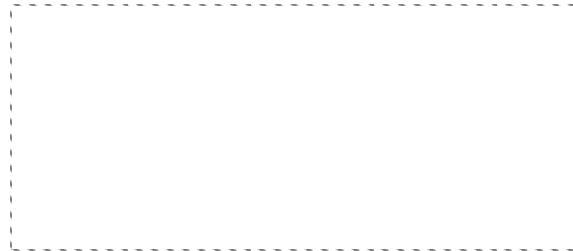
Ruth Mason is a freelance writer who lives in Jerusalem. Page 7

Jewish Women's Center of Pittsburgh

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TO:



The JWC Mission:

The Jewish Women's Center is a community of women of all backgrounds that provides educational opportunities and spiritual experiences rooted in Jewish values and feminist ideals. The JWC is a supportive environment for broadening our knowledge and involvement in Jewish life. The programs and resources of the JWC create opportunities for Jewish women's learning, leadership, spiritual growth and ritual practice.

