

HCRJ

February 2014

HOUSTON CONGREGATION FOR REFORM JUDAISM



The Jews of India

The history of the Jews of India is believed to date back thousands of years. Many believe that the first Jewish community arrived in India shortly after the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE, making Judaism one of the earliest foreign religions to arrive in India in recorded history.

In contrast to other parts of the world, India's relationship with Judaism remained consistently open and tolerant. Throughout history, Jews have been welcome and accepted. There has been no known anti-Semitism in India nor have Jews ever been viewed in ways that differ from any of the myriad of cultural or religious minorities that reside in the country. This high level of tolerance and acceptance is, in part, due to the fact that neither Jews nor Hindus proselytize. As a result, the greater Hindu community has never felt threatened by a Jewish presence.

Furthermore, the general nature of India's pluralistic culture is porous enough to absorb hundreds of different religions and belief systems. In such an environment, Judaism was simply understood as yet another spiritual path in a sea of intertwining faiths and traditions. Thus, India's Jews have long found a spiritual and cultural sanctuary - the likes of which were rarely found in any of the countries where Jews sought refuge.

Over the course of centuries, five Jewish groups became established communities in India. The oldest Jewish community is that of the Jews of Cochin. They arrived in India 2,500 years ago, and continue to have a presence on the western coast. The Bene Israel represent the largest community and they claim that their ancestors arrived 2,100 years ago after a shipwreck stranded seven Jewish families just south of Mumbai. They were nicknamed the *shaniṽār telī* ("Saturday oil-pressers") by the local population because they abstained from working their oil-presses on the Sabbath. The Baghdadi Jews arrived in the city of Mumbai from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Arab countries about 250 years ago and have found great opportunity in the world of business and trade. Finally, there are the Bnei Menashe and the Bene Ephraim. Each of these groups have newer connections to the Jewish faith.

Before the establishment of the State of Israel, the Jewish community of India numbered approximately 30,000. In 1948, most of India's Jews migrated to Israel. Today only seven to eight thousand Jews remain, most of which are of Bene Israel origin.

On Friday night, February 21, join us for a special Sabbath in the tradition of India's Jewish community. Traditional Indian music and food will shape an exotic evening as we learn about this unique and richly spiritual aspect of our cultural heritage.

A Sabbath Meal from India

Join us on February 21 at 6:00PM for an Indian Shabbat Dinner featuring the foods from a local Indian restaurant. Enjoy this exotic Sabbath meal while listening to traditional Indian music. This special evening promises to transport us to the Jewish communities of India.

The cost is \$18 per person (\$10 per child) and your check/payment is your RSVP. Payments can be made online by visiting www.hcrj.org, clicking on the link to make a donation and selecting the Got Shabbat? India Dinner selection in the drop down menu. RSVP's must be received by February 18.

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

- 1 10:30 AM Bar Mitzvah of Justin Williams
- 2 9:00 AM Religious School Family Breakfast
9:30 AM Religious School
- 7 6:00 PM Tot Shabbat
6:15 PM Family Dinner
7:15 PM Family Shabbat Services
- 9 9:30 AM Religious School
- 11 11:30 AM Knitzvah Group
7:00 PM Board Meeting
- 12 10:30 AM Interest Group
- 14 6:00 PM Valentine's Shabbat Dinner
7:15 PM Blues Shabbat
- 16 10:00 AM Yom Limmud (No Religious School)
- 21 7:15 PM **got Shabbat?** Jews of India
- 22 Confirmation retreat
- 23 9:30 AM Religious School
6:00 PM Sup and Swap
- 25 11:30 AM Knitzvah Group
- 26 7:00 PM Book Club
- 27 9:00 AM Life Line Screening
- 28 7:15 PM Shabbat Services

got shabbat?

Take a journey with us on a year long, congregation-wide program called **got shabbat?** Loosely based on the popular **got milk?**® campaign, **got shabbat?** seeks to draw attention to the idea that the Sabbath is a value that nourishes the soul. The cornerstones of our programming take place on the third Sabbath of every month.

February 21: A Sabbath from India's Jewish Community

Traditional Indian music and food will shape an exotic evening as we learn about the Bene Israel (Jews of India). This event will also serve as an interfaith exchange as we invite members of Houston's Hindu community to an evening of learning and sharing.

March 21: A Sabbath of Contemporary Melodies

Family Shabbat

February 7, 2014 at 6:15PM

February Menu: Fajitas, corn, beans, chicken nuggets and mac n cheese.

Dinner is \$5 per person over 4 years old.



For our Tots:



Tot Shabbat Services on February 7 at 6:00 PM. Join Elmo and Rabbi Gross for Shabbat fun.

Knitzvah Group

We chat, we eat, we knit/crochet, all for good causes! Join us the second and fourth Tuesday of each month from 11:30 to 1:00. Newcomers are always welcome. Basic instruction is provided.



Interest Group

The Interest Group will meet Wednesday, February 12 at 10:30 AM. Rabbi Gross will start off the Temple's month long conversation about Jews in India and will also include videos and anecdotes about his trip there while a college student. Come early for bagels and coffee and bring a friend.



HCRJ BOOK CLUB



Join us February 26 for tasty food & lively conversation.

Flowers in the Blood by Gay Courter

Save the Date: March 26

The Dovekeepers by Alice Hoffman

If you have any questions, please contact the temple at adulted@hcrj.org. HCRJ Book Club Reading List can be found on our website.

Save the Date: Hamantaschen Baking!

Our first baking day for making Hamantaschen will take place on **March 2 at 10:30AM**. We will be making the hamantaschen that will be used for our Religious School as well as for our Oneg during Purim. In addition to needing bakers, we will also need volunteers to prepare the dough ahead of time (it can be frozen and then defrosted for baking day). Please email Carol Danek for the recipe at cdanek22@gmail.com or to volunteer for baking day.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Honors and Memorials

In memory of Bess Berger and Marion Cartagena
From **Mark, Nancy, Audrey & Louis Kariel**

In memory of Max Sapsowitz
From **Bruce and Laura Shelby**

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

In honor of Rabbi Gross
From **Byron and Amber York**
From **David and Maria Gross**
In honor of Sarah Helfand's Bat Mitzvah
From **Bill and Kristin Helfand**
In memory of Rick Baron
From **Valerie Baron**
In memory of Conner Anhalt
From **The Anhalt and Deutser Families**
In honor of Katy Belcher's Bat Mitzvah
From **Barbara Friedman**
In honor of Caroline Elizabeth McElroy's 2nd birthday
From **Michael and Gary Nathanson**

Mitzvah Day

From **Byron and Amber York**

General Operating

From **Ted and Maria Johnson**

Sponsored an oneg

Esther Shelby

BRAG AND BOAST



Mazel Tov to Justin Williams, son of Rita and Jeff Williams, who will become a Bar Mitzvah on February 1, 2014.



Mazel Tov to Jed and Erika Mandel on the birth of their son, Jack Harrison Mandel, who was born on January 3, 2014.



Mazel Tov to Brian Feilkow on publishing his new book, *Driving to Perfection*. His book is available for purchase on Amazon.



Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism is pleased to offer a preventive health event. Life Line Screening, a leading provider of community-based preventive health screenings, will host their affordable, non-invasive and painless health screenings on 2/27/2014. Five screenings will be offered that scan for potential health problems related to: blocked arteries which is a leading cause of stroke; abdominal aortic aneurysms which can lead to a ruptured aorta; hardening of the arteries in the legs which is a strong predictor of heart disease; atrial fibrillation or irregular heart beat which is closely tied to stroke risk; and a bone density screening, for men and women, used to assess the risk of osteoporosis. Register for a Wellness Package which includes 4 vascular tests and osteoporosis screening from \$149. All five screenings take 60-90 minutes to complete. **In order to register for this event and to receive a \$10 discount off any package priced above \$129, please call 1-888-653-6441 or visit: www.lifelinescreening.com/community-partners.**

Condolences

Our heartfelt condolences...

On the death of Shel Mitelman who passed away on January 24, 2014. Shel was the longtime companion of Sandra Cameron, of blessed memory, mother of Beckye Levin and her husband Rabbi Steve Gross, and Lisa Cashion and her husband Hade.

May the memory of our beloved ones always remain a blessing to those who were graced by their presence.

February Sabbath Oneg Sponsorships

A wonderful mitzvah opportunity awaits you!

Celebrate a life cycle event or honor a loved one by sponsoring a Friday Night Oneg (Sabbath reception), a Family Sabbath Dinner or a Religious School Breakfast. These events represent just some of the ways our community gathers in fellowship, and your sponsorship enables us to frame these occasions with additional beauty and joy.

If you wish to sponsor a meal or a Sabbath reception, please let us know by filling out the form below or by contacting the temple at least two weeks prior to the event. We hope you will consider this special sponsorship opportunity. Thank you for your ongoing support of HCRJ.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sabbath Oneg —\$100.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious School Breakfast—\$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Shabbat Dinner —\$150.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Contribution to Arrangements Fund—\$____ |

In honor/memory of: _____ Date of event: _____

Your name: _____

February Sabbath Oneg Sponsorships:

February 1: Oneg sponsored by the Williams Family in honor of Justin William's Bar Mitzvah

February 7: Available

February 14: Oneg sponsored by Kay & Fred Zeidman Family in honor of the birth of their grandson, Charles Patrick Snelgrove.

February 21: Available

February 28: Available

Please contact Melissa Wolfson at hcrj@hcrj.org if you are interested in sponsoring on one of the open dates.

A Valentine's Sabbath

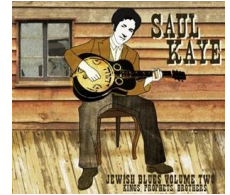
Valentine's Day is one of those uniquely American celebrations like Thanksgiving and Halloween. It does not belong to Christianity, Judaism or any other faith. If it belongs to anyone, it belongs to Hallmark, the florists and the chocolate companies of the world.

While it is not a religious holiday, its primary focus **is** religious to its core. The expression of love, romantic or otherwise, is central to every religion. Love is the seat of goodness, kindness, compassion and understanding. Love is the emotion that drives empathy and caring, and it is an emotion that each of us tries to nurture throughout our lives.



Join us on Friday night, February 14 and nurture your soul with a Sabbath Experience with a romantic twist. Our evening will begin with a congregational Shabbat dinner with a Valentine's twist. Enjoy an elegant Italian meal accompanied by Cole Porter tunes sung by our own Jane Becker. Dinner is \$18 per person. Babysitting, activities and dinner is available for \$10 per child. You can register online at www.hcrj.org or by mailing a check to HCRJ.

After dinner, experience the joys of Jewish prayer in an entirely different way as Saul Kaye, Jewish blues artist, shapes the mood of our worship service with the soulful sounds of rhythm and blues. This Sabbath experience is a perfect complement to anyone's Valentine's celebration.



Sup & Swap – Celebrating India

Sunday night, February 23, 6:00 PM

Swap: Bring a book about India (fiction or non-fiction) to share with the group

Sup : Vegetarian

Please, please RSVP to Melissa Wolfson at (713) 782-4162 so that we know how many to prepare for. Questions may be directed to Julie Barry at jbarry@juliebarrylaw.com



Marriage and Merlot

On Thursdays in March, we will begin a special program for engaged and recently married couples. With wine and cheese setting the tone for the program, Rabbi Gross and his wife, Beckye, will facilitate a series of discussions designed to help couples explore issues of intimacy, communication and finances in a safe and non-threatening environment.



The size of this program will be limited to ten couples, so if you are interested in participating, please contact Rabbi Gross at rabbigross@hcrj.org as soon as possible. The group will determine the time and location of these discussions.

Yom Limmud



Perhaps the best known of the BJE's programs is its annual **Yom Limmud or Day of Jewish Learning**. Yom Limmud provides a unique opportunity for Jewish learners from all denominations and walks of life to come together in one place at one time to learn, exchange ideas, and share experiences. Scores of seminars, featuring presentations by rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, college professors, cultural arts specialists, and other experts are facilitated throughout the day. The event also provides special programming for children and teachers. Yom Limmud 2014 will take place on Sunday, February 16, at Congregation Emanu El.

College Prep Program for 10th-12th Grade Families

February 23 at 12:00PM (after Religious School)



Save the date for our College Prep program at HCRJ. All current 10th-12th grade students and parents are invited to join us on February 23rd at 12 noon for lunch a wonderful program on getting ready for college. We will be featuring two outstanding speakers to help prepare your family for what's ahead. First we will welcome Susan Meyers, an expert college admissions consultant. Then we will have an opportunity to hear from Michelle Blumenthal, Director of Jewish Life at Houston Hillel. Please RSVP to Hilaryk@hcrj.org

Scholarships for Camp

Do not allow tight finances to prevent you from sending your child to camp this summer. Greene Family Camp has financial aid programs available. Interested families may go to the "Parents" section of the Greene Family Camp website to look at and download information and applications at www.greene.urjcamp.org

The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston's Bureau of Jewish Education is now accepting applications from families who need assistance to provide their children with a Jewish summer experience. For more information or to request an application, please contact Paulette Walden the Bureau of Jewish Education at pwalden@houstonjewish.org. HCRJ also has some scholarship funds available. Please contact Hilary Kamin for more information at hilaryk@hcrj.org.

Summer Fun at Greene Family Camp



Many of us are in the process of making summer plans. Some have children and grandchildren who are of age to go to camp. Others may know someone with

children who are of campership age.

If you are considering a Jewish camp experience, please consider Greene Family Camp. Studies have shown that residential camps like Greene are instrumental in the formation of a child's Jewish identity. With a wonderful balance between education and recreation, the Greene Family Camp is one of our nation's premier Jewish summer camp experiences.

Registration is simple. If you went to camp last summer, log-in to your account to reregister. If you were not here last summer, registration is a breeze. Just go to the Greene Family Camp website at <http://greene.urjcamp.org/register/> and complete the online application.

Souper Bowl of Caring

Souper Bowl of Caring is a national movement of congregations, schools, community organizations and compassionate individuals caring for others on Super Bowl weekend (January 31– February 2). Souper Bowl of Caring equips and mobilizes youth to positively impact their communities by collecting money or food on or near Super Bowl weekend. 100% of the collections are donated directly to the charity of each group's choice.

We are collecting change at the Religious School breakfast to be donated to the Souper Bowl of Caring. Join us to help those who are less fortunate.



Upcoming HOUSTY Events

Max Williams here, and I am very excited about the wonderful opportunities for our youth this month. To start off, on Saturday February 8 our 6th grade will be teaming up with the 7th grade class from congregation Beth-El San Antonio. We will be visiting the Holocaust Museum, going to lunch and participating in other fun activities.

We also have an amazing opportunity for you and kids to experience Greene Family Camp! The GFC Family Retreat will take place February 28-March 2, 2014. For more details visit <http://greene.urjcamp.org/yearround/retreats/family/>

Sneak peek for March: There will be another chance for our HOUSTY kids (6th-8th) to go to Greene Family Camp March 21-23, 2014. For more information, visit <http://www.nfty.org/tor/events/jyg/>

Kesher Birthright Israel Trip

URJ KESHER is an official provider of Taglit-Birthright Israel trips. Each trip is 10-days and is absolutely free. Trips are open to Jewish young adults who are 18-26 and who have never been to Israel on a peer program. URJ KESHER is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the beauty of Israel and form friendships with North American and Israeli peers.

Registration will open on February 19 at 9:00 AM. Sign-up by visiting www.gokesher.org, and take your first step to Israel now! Please email Rabbi Gross at rabbigross@hcrj.org if you or your child will be signing up for a URJ Kesher Taglit-Birthright Israel trip.





MITZVAH DAY 2013

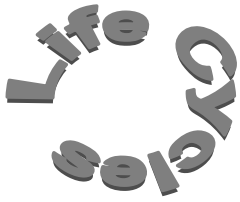


A special thank you to Carol Danek and Teri Goldfield (pictured to the left with Rabbi Gross,) the 2013 Mitzvah Day Chairs. Through its various activities, Mitzvah Day brought the HCRJ community together in a very special way. It taught our children the value and importance of doing mitzvot and it enabled us to extend ourselves to others in their time of need. This very special day would not have been as successful were it not for the coordinated efforts of our Mitzvah Day Committee and Volunteers.

The chairs of our Mitzvah Day projects did a fabulous job in coordinating the efforts of hundreds of volunteers. In the photos below, Mitzvah Day workers prepare toiletry bags for the AIDS Foundation, decorate vases for congregants in the hospital, make fleece blankets, and get finger prints taken. Other projects included making love blankets for babies in the hospital, decorating holiday cards and making lunches for residents of Turning Point Center, assembling origami kits for patients at Texas Children's Hospital, cutting and sorting coupons for military stationed overseas, building a distribution box for HCRJ and reorganizing HCRJ's archived materials.



The Mitzvah Day Committee wishes to thank everyone for giving their generous donations-in-kind at Mitzvah Day. Your donated items will be appreciated and enjoyed by all recipients. If you would like to receive a tax receipt for those donations, please contact the temple office.



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

2/1 Julie Reader
2/2 Jonathan Siegel
2/2 Charlotte Gomel
2/2 Theodore Helfgott
2/2 Claire Getschow
2/3 Lharissa Jacobs
2/4 Henry Lam
2/6 Andrew Edison
2/7 Eileen Weinstein
2/10 David Naman
2/10 Lou Marks
2/12 Sue Sue Aron
2/12 Amber York
2/12 Kenny Friedman
2/12 Bradley Frank
2/14 Richard Braverman
2/15 Rick Silverman
2/16 Dionna Levin
2/16 Dennis Sucec
2/17 Adam Plager
2/18 Courtney Lipp
2/18 Scott Asarch
2/21 Jennifer Touchet
2/22 Julie Levin
2/22 Laura Neustadt
2/23 Alan Falik
2/25 Harvey Fuson
2/26 Jeffry Lewis
2/26 Jaime Perkins
2/26 Ione Moran
2/26 Morton Fefer
2/28 Benjamin Bass
2/28 Eric Marglous

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

2/2 Robert & Janis Frank
2/8 Leonard & Eleanor Chaikind
2/8 Lou Marks & Paula Abramson
2/9 Jack & Barbara Markman
2/12 Michael & Amy Lawch
2/14 Walter & Sandra Rosen
2/15 Jodi & Armando Vazquez
2/28 Rick & Georgiann Silverman

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO OUR KIDS!

2/2 Logan Belcher
2/4 Renee Shohet
2/5 Rachael Marglous
2/7 Lilian Howard
2/8 Brett Gonzalez
2/8 Reid Gross
2/8 Austin Wilson
2/10 Adalaide Eagle
2/11 Abraham Touchet
2/11 Mackenzie Aden
2/13 Maci Wilson
2/14 Aiden Gross
2/15 Jamie Anhalt
2/15 Robbie Nicholls
2/18 Isabel Graubart
2/21 Adeline Braverman
2/22 Jonathan Frumovitz
2/22 Olivia Howard
2/28 Isabel Kariel

FEBRUARY YARZEIT

2/1 Pearl Plotkin
2/2 Fannie Marks
2/3 Walter Mathis
2/4 Julie Rosen
2/4 Bernard Rachlin
2/5 Bertha Golden
2/6 Simon Sartorius
2/7 Bertha Mayerhofer
2/8 Simon Utay
2/8 Harry Green
2/9 Samuel Abramson
2/11 Edith Karkowski
2/11 Herman Schlanger
2/11 David Kassab
2/12 Mildred Marks
2/13 Isabelle Podorzer
2/14 Herbert Robins
2/15 Max Silverman
2/15 David Roos
2/15 Jennie Hurwitz
2/15 Alfred Rubin
2/16 Anne Mills
2/17 Helen Sandhaus
2/17 Sarah Butkin
2/20 Beatrice Zeidman
2/20 Herbert Alpert
2/20 Bertha Brochstein
2/21 Mary Ann Tartakov
2/21 Mike Phillips
2/21 Harold Mason
2/22 Esther Polunsky
2/23 Evan Davis
2/24 Shirley Kessler
2/26 Hannah Frank
2/26 Ben Schreiber
2/26 Audrey Lawch
2/27 Nona Marks
2/27 Adolph Katz
2/28 Don Painter
2/28 Anna Kessler
2/28 Edmund Hecht
2/28 Clara Mace

Leave a Legacy to HCRJ

Contribute to the continuation of HCRJ's dedicated rabbis, educators and programs by remembering HCRJ through a charitable trust or gift annuity. No matter how large or small, your bequest may be directed toward general operations or to an area of special interest to you. Your dedication to HCRJ will be felt even after you are gone.

You are invited to join HCRJ
for our monthly



February 7, 2014
Dinner 6:15 pm
Sabbath Services 7:15 pm

\$5.00 per person

Please feel free to bring a side dish to show off your culinary talents.

February Menu:

Fajitas with corn, beans,
chicken nuggets and mac n cheese.

Steven M. Gross, Senior Rabbi
rabbigross@hcrj.org (private email)

Michael P. Le Burkien, Rabbi Emeritus
rabbileburkien@sbcglobal.net (private email)

Melissa Wolfson, Temple Administrator
hcrj@hcrj.org

Hilary Kamin, Director of Education
hilaryk@hcrj.org

Allan Graber, President
president@hcrj.org

Steve Mikelman, Vice-President
vicepresident@hcrj.org

Julie Barry, Secretary
secretary@hcrj.org

Bruce Shelby, Treasurer
treasurer@hcrj.org

JoAnn Innerarity, Past President
pastpresident@hcrj.org

Kristin Helfand, Membership Chair
membership@hcrj.org

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Newsletter articles, suggestions for articles and corrections are welcome. Deadline for submission is the 15th of the month.