

CONGREGATION BETH AHM OF WEST ESSEX

Serving the communities of Verona • The Caldwells • Glen Ridge
Montclair • The Oranges • Livingston • Cedar Grove • Essex Fells
Fairfield • Roseland • Little Falls and beyond

Kol Ha'ahm

FROM THE RABBI'S DESK

REDEMPTION OF SORTS

My mother-in-law, Raya Azia died from a hospital error on the fifth day of Pesah. She was born into a wealthy and educated family. She attended the finest school in Vilna. Until the age of fourteen she lived a charmed life, but all that changed when the Nazis invaded Vilna, her home town. Her entire family was destroyed. She was in line for the gas chamber too when her mother told her to jump into the other line. She did and she alone lived.

When the war ended the now poor orphan girl did not look back. She rebuilt her life. She married, had two children, and moved to the unsettled Negev town of Beer Sheva. The Nazis did not destroy her will or her desire to help rebuild the Jewish homeland. She lived through many wars in Israel. Both of her children served in the Israeli Army. Her husband was many times decorated for his heroism.

However, the long hours that she had to stand barefoot in the German snow during her incarceration had ruined the circulation in her legs, and the stress of those early years damaged her heart. In old age that damage threatened to take her life. Her heart was enlarged and she could not breathe.

She was hospitalized with few days left to live. Her daughter, my wife, travelled to Israel to be with her. The doctors told Raya that she was a very sick woman. They did not want to operate. They told her the operation was very dangerous and she only had a ten percent chance to survive. Ironically, she told the doctors "No, you do not understand. The operation is not dangerous. Life was dangerous when I was in the concentration camps. Now I am in the hands of my people. That is not dangerous."

So the doctor's operated and the operation was successful. Afterward, the surgeons learned to love Raya. One took videos of her that he put with his collection of videos of his family. One would come and kiss her every night. One surgeon, an Arab, would check on her when his rounds were finished late at night. She had the best care in the world. She was the favorite of all the heads of the departments and of so many doctors and nurses.

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On Pesah she celebrated Seder with her daughter. She was to be released from the hospital in just days. That night of Pesah something went terribly wrong. A piece of equipment that she was not using and was to be removed the next day became displaced and did not allow her to breathe. The monitor rang at the nurses' desk, but they did not come in a timely manner. When they did arrive Raya was brain dead. Days later her body gave out and she died.

She died in the 'hands of her people.' She died the way that her mother and sisters died, from a lack of oxygen, only no one wanted to kill her.

The Sunday after her death, Easter Sunday to be exact, during the mass at Verona's Our Lady of the Lake, Father Hanley said a prayer in her memory. Seventy-two years ago non-Jews wanted to take her life because she was Jewish. Weeks ago the gentile community in Verona prayed for her soul. They found her death a tragedy.

The world is changing. Where once there was sectarian division and sometimes hatred, now there is recognition that all people are brothers and sisters created by the same God. Finally, if only in Verona, people live by that law, which states: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

My mother-in-law was almost destroyed by hatred, but died in a world where people of different creeds and religions loved her and were saddened by her passing.



Photo by Milton Levinson, Sept. 1972
Raya Azia, Sarah Kriegel, Avraham Azia, Ida and
Rabbi Alter Kriegel

ZICHRONAM LIVRACHAH MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

We extend condolences to:

Sarah, Rabbi, Liat, Elan and Tamir Kriegel on the passing of Sarah's beloved mother Raya Azia (4/23/11)

Elaine Stromfeld Blumenthal, Gary Stromfeld and Linda Stromfeld Lampinen on the passing of their beloved father, Morris "Moe" Stromfeld, on (4/15/11)

Connie Adams on the passing of her beloved mother and our long-time member, Florence Gatty Adams (4/6/11)

FROM THE PRESIDENT
DEAN GORDON

A 75th anniversary is a wonderful event. Many institutions never make it this far. We have had our fair share of ups and downs in our history; several times, whether through internal divisions or financial woes, the very existence of Congregation Beth Ahm hung in the balance. And yet we survived and continued to provide whatever it is that our members found important in their lives: spiritual sustenance, intellectual stimulation, a warm place of community or a shul to educate their children in the language and values of our people.

But just because we have made it 75 years doesn't automatically give us a reason to exist in year 76. Any institution must continually justify its existence or it perishes; that goes for a town, a business, an educational institution, or even a nation. When we were growing up and raising families, could anyone even imagine that the Soviet Union would one day cease to exist? It was unthinkable, yet it happened. It crumbled from within because its leaders and people just couldn't justify its existence anymore. It had no reason for being. Businesses go under everyday because they are not providing people products or services they need. Towns wither away and die because they can't replenish their population by giving new families a compelling reason to move there.

And so it is with any house of worship. Nobody has to pick Congregation Beth Ahm as their shul. There are plenty of synagogues in the surrounding towns from which to choose. Rather we, as an institution, just like the businesses, towns, colleges or nations mentioned above, must continually give new members a reason to come here and give our current members a reason to stay. I think that our Rabbi and Cantor are two major reasons that people choose us. They are extraordinary. Our Children's Learning Center is second to none in the quality of education our children receive and moreover, the students actually want to attend. Unheard of. Our Adult Education program is second to none.

Yet even those reasons are not enough, so as we approach our Annual Affair with joy and appreciation, we need to look for even more ways to attract new members to our shul. With the help of Adam Radzik, our Program Chair, we will be expanding our Speaker's Program with an exciting and stimulating slate of authors, journalists and thought-provoking presentations. We will be bringing in singers on Friday night to make our services more child-friendly. We will be presenting more concerts and special events to draw in the community to see just what we have to offer here.

In short, we will not rest on our laurels. We will not make our first 75 years a reason to exist another 75. We will work, we will re-invigorate our institution and we will give people even more reasons for choosing Congregation Beth Ahm as their home. This coming year will be our Year of Re-commitment.

NEW ADULT EDUCATION CLASS STARTING IN MAY: Drop in and study with us!

A History of Jewish Thought (Part III) (4 Monday's at 7:00 PM – May 2, 9, 16 & 23) – This class details Judaism through the minds of seminal Jewish philosophers. It will begin with one of the great philosophers of our people and of ancient world, Philo, and continue to present day philosophers. Part III will concentrate on the philosophies of the Reform, Conservative AND Orthodox movements with special emphasis on Buber, Heschel and Kaplan.

BOARD BITS

From 3/8/2011

*DVAR TORAH focused on Spring and with it the concepts of freedom, and blooming anew. This year, for us at Beth Ahm, this coincides with our 75th anniversary celebration. Old members have come forward, eagerly, glad that Beth Ahm has been here for them. Present members need to come forward, too, to assure that Beth Ahm continues to bloom. Contributing to making the 75th anniversary celebration a success is a way of accomplishing this.

*RENTAL POSSIBILITY by the WEST ORANGE COOPERATIVE YESHIVA, a new private Jewish, Orthodox, secular school which hopes will open in the fall with a kindergarten class of 8-15 children. They would like to rent part of our currently unused school space. Discussion, investigation and research are underway.

*BETH AHM'S WEB SITE is up and running and is BEAUTIFUL. Be sure to check it out! Many thanks especially to Laurie Brandt for her hard work on this and for the volume of information she gathered and organized to make the site very special.

*75th ANNIVERSARY GALA AFFAIR IS COMING UP ON JUNE 12. Be sure to get in your reservation and your entry in the historical, keepsake, ad journal. Ad journal spots are a major source of revenue to keep Beth Ahm afloat.

*CLEAN UP DAY in April was very successful.. Please come out on May 15 to help move forward on this project.

*MENS CLUB AND WOMENS LEAGUE are both busy with many projects. Check their separate announcements.

*BUDGET is hurting. What's new? Contributions are down. Though expenses have been pared, costs for things like heating the building and snow removal this winter are up. Please pay your dues in a timely fashion and make contributions when you can.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Aaron Kriegel, Rabbi / Marsha Schreier, Cantor

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Emer Featherstone	Bookkeeper
Joe Chmielewski	Custodians
Judy Maher	

BULLETIN

Debbie Lawrence	Editor
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RABBI'S CONTRACT is in the hands of attorney Jack Wurgaft for finalization. It is a 2 year contract which holds his salary steady and which has a 2 year option attached.

***CONGREGATIONAL MEETING ***

May 17 at 8pm

It is very important that all congregants are present to ratify the budget for the coming year and to elect our new officers.

WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Book Sale Wrap Up

Thank you to everyone from the congregation who donated hundreds of books, CDs and DVDs for the March 27th Women's League book sale. A special thanks to the 20 or so congregants and their family members and friends who gave up their Saturday night and Sunday afternoon to set up and staff the event, and clean up after.

It was a great success— in terms of earnings, congregational and community involvement, and fun. And a very special thank you to Marsha Schreier for the loan of her office to store our books for many moons—she never complained!

We hope to do it all again in the fall. Please save your books for us and check the newsletter for drop-off and event dates.

MIDEAST SYMPOSIUM

Tuesday, May 10th
7:30 pm

Congregation Beth Ahm will host a speech and discussion by David Halperin, Program Director and Policy Analyst at Israel Policy Forum, regarding Israel's options amid the fast-changing conditions in the Middle East. He will address how the revolution in Egypt and the unrest in other countries in the region affect Israeli foreign policy and how the recent agreement between Hamas and Fatah could change the area's delicate power balance. Amid his other credits, Mr. Halperin has been named an International Fellow at Columbia University's School for International and Public Affairs. There is a suggested contribution of \$5 at the door.

Dear Rabbi Kriegel,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the lovely Purim Mish-loach Manot baskets. There were distributed to families in town who are in need.

The recipients were delighted and the children especially enjoyed the contents. Although many of the families were not Jewish, the boxes presented a wonderful opportunity to share the story of Purim and the traditions of the holiday (which they also enjoyed).

Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness, it was most appreciated.

*Sincerely,
Connie Piffner
Health and Social Services*

CHILDREN'S LEARNING CENTER

The students are in their last month of Hebrew School. They spent the last few weeks making Haroset, learning about the order of the seder, Exodus from Egypt, played an Afikomen game and search for Chametz. There will be Junior Congregation at Yom Ha'Shoah (5/1), Yom Ha'Atz'maut (5/13) and Teacher Recognition (5/21), which will include a kiddush sponsored by the parents. Registration for the 2011-2012 School year will begin on June 1st.

We hope the congregation will join us on May 21st for Shabbat services to recognize the wonderful job our teachers have done this year with our children in the Hebrew school.

