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The Ethical Implications of Ma'oz Tzur

by Laurie Hahn Tapper

Ma'oz Tzur

O mighty stronghold of my salvation, to praise You is a delight. Restore my House of Prayer and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering. When You will have prepared the slaughter for the blaspheming foe, Then I shall complete with a song of hymn the dedication of the Altar.

The warm glow of freshly lit Hanukkah candles fills the room, my family stands arm in arm, and as the wick of the last candle is ignited, we gleefully burst into a rousing rendition of the first stanza of *Ma'oz Tzur*. Somebody laughs as battling versions from my mom's family and my dad's family try to out-sing each other, my brother sticks in some extra jazzy notes and be-bops, and after a couple of rounds of the same stanza, we leave the song behind in eager anticipation of the exchanging of gifts. The memory and the feeling is one of warmth and joy, togetherness and peace. No attention is ever paid to the actual words that we sing, but rather the tune, the song, the joy in the moment.

In college I started taking Hebrew more seriously. I will never forget the first time my Hebrew was good enough to understand the words I was singing to this joyful tune. The warm peacefulness of the moment was shattered by the reality of the words' meaning. There was a sharp dissonance between the feeling of the ritual and the words on the page. Were we really singing that God should prepare the destruction of another people, even if those people were our enemies? And would we really sing such a request in such a joyous manner? Hadn't I been taught at Passover when we remove wine from our glass in honour of the Egyptians who died, that when our enemies die, we acknowledge their death regretfully and sadly? Why was this tune to these words so joyful?

Why must this evening — one of family togetherness and giving, when we celebrate the survival of our Jewish identity, our liberation from religious oppression, and the miracle of light in moments of darkness — be tinged by a song that beseeches God to carry out violence on our behalf? Where is the line that separates celebrating our freedom and liberation from celebrating the slaughter of those who oppress us? **Continued on page 8**

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President's Message

Needy People Need Us

How many of us have heard this: "So-and-so is so needy; she's always calling me and asking me over. I have a life, you know!?" The sense

that we are over-stretched, over-booked and under-appreciated is so strong we often turn away from the people in our lives who ask for our time and energy. It's really hard to give our precious personal resources, particularly when we're giving to people who never seem to be satisfied or happy. And we often feel that we've given all we can; there's just nothing left in our spiritual batteries.

I sympathize; heaven knows I sometimes get home and turn off the phone and computer. "I'm tired, I don't want to deal with this, I just need a break." And yet, it is a mitzvah and an honour to be present in a very real way for the people who trust us and ask us to be there for them. I'm not suggesting we give in to every whim and wish of the people we love – safe, sane boundaries are important in every relationship we have, and we have an obligation to ourselves to maintain necessary limits. What I am saying is that, in our relating, we need to add compassion to our box of coping tools when dealing with the hard-to-deal-with.

At this season of joyous family gatherings and parties with many friends, there will be lost souls who tell us of the need for more than the usual "hi, how are you?" from those who pass through their lives. In the dancing glow of the Chanukah candles, look around and see if there is someone who is just a little more desperate, and give of your time. This small act of being wholly present is a holy present, and one that will make a bigger difference in the lives of that "needy" person than you will ever know. This year, let us make the festival of lights one of compassionate caring, and let our light shine through.

Chag sameach Chukat

Jenny



Tzedakah Box – exact replica of Shmuel Synagogue (1902), Bialystock, Poland.



Rabbi Jane Writes

Affirmative Judaism

Last December a young couple came to me to discuss a problem. The man was Jewish and the woman was “nothing,” that is, she had been raised with no religious background; her parents were nominally Protestant. The couple was engaged to be married, and had agreed to rear their children as Jews. The woman was contemplating conversion. This was the first year they lived together. I wonder if you can guess the nature of their problem?

She wanted to have a Christmas tree in their new home and he was completely opposed to the idea. For her, the Christmas tree was a secular (actually she called it “pagan”) symbol of a fun secular holiday. For him it was something else altogether. They wanted my thoughts on the matter. I think the man was somewhat surprised when my first question was not about Christmas at all, but about his Jewish practice. “How often do you celebrate Shabbat?” I asked. “Do you build a sukkah? Practice mishloach manot (gift giving) at Purim? Go to a Tu b’Shevat seder? Celebrate havdalah? Have a tzedakah box on your mantle, mezuzot on your doorposts?”

The answers were, “Never, no, no, no, no, no, and no.” He added, “I may not do much that is Jewish, but I’ll never have a Christmas tree in my home!” She looked at me in confusion, “I just don’t understand what he’s so upset about. He’s not making any sense to me.” For this man, not having a Christmas tree was his primary symbol of Jewish identity. That was a line in the sand, and on it rested 100% of his Jewish practice. No wonder she didn’t understand his issue.

I often meet or talk to Jews whose primary Jewish identification is negative, what they’re not. This makes me sad, because Judaism is so rich and full for what we are. Judaism is a set of positive cultural values and spiritual practices that give meaning and guidance to our lives. It is my experience that among most mixed heritage families that engage in a full and satisfying Jewish practice, the issue of the “TREE” just becomes irrelevant.

To such couples as this one, I often suggest that they put the argument over the tree on hold for a year - flip a coin or whatever. It doesn’t really matter. The important thing is turn that negative engagement into something positive, to upgrade the quality of their Jewish practice. I strongly suggest to them that if they enroll in an Introduction to Judaism class, come to Torah study, celebrate the holy days, and otherwise make Judaism an active and vibrant part of their lives, they’ll have a very different discussion in the following year. They may not resolve the issue of the tree, but it will be a discussion they both understand more clearly.

Mixed heritage families (I’m avoiding the word “interfaith” because many of these families do not have two faiths) face many challenges, particularly at this time of year. However, it’s important to keep “the December Dilemma” in proportion. Judaism is a year round way of life, not merely a negative reaction to Christmas ubiquity this time of year. I wish that every Jew put as much energy into positive Jewish practice throughout the year as into feeling beleaguered in December.

The couple did not come back to see me this year. I bumped into her at a community social action event and asked how things were coming along. She said, “You mean the Christmas tree problem?” I nodded. “We’re still talking, and you were right, the conversation is very different this year. I’m not sure what we’ll decide, but now I have a much better sense of what it all means. I didn’t realize the complexities of Jewish identity.” I laughed, “Welcome to the club. After twenty-five years in the rabbinate, I’m still finding it out every day.”

Jane

Dear Reva,

To you personally — and to Kolot Mayim — please accept our thanks for your generous donation and continued support and participation. It is sincerely appreciated.

From strength to strength - together!

*Penny Tennenhouse,
on behalf of Avodah*

Dear Kolot Mayim Temple members,

Thank you for your generous donation to Sandy Merriman House. Your kind support is much appreciated.

Warm regards,

Kathy

You are Amazing!

Thanks again for your support — We couldn't do it without you!

*Out of the Closet
Renew Boutique*

Jewish law requires every individual to give **tzedakah**, even one who is himself sustained by the tzedakah of others. If the purpose of tzedakah were merely to rectify the unequal distribution of wealth between rich and poor, this law would make no sense. Tzedakah, however, is much more than that: it is the opportunity granted to every person to become a "partner with God in creation."

Chai חַי

Did you know that we have provided you with an opportunity to commemorate important events in the lives of your family and friends? Our Chai Fund appears in the Newsletter every month and contains the names of the donor and the occasion. These can be "Thank Yous," messages of condolence, good wishes for weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, anniversaries, birthdays, appreciation or anything you find noteworthy. A card will be sent by us on your behalf to the person(s) you wish to honour. Chai Fund donations are a great way to raise much needed funds for our Congregation, and are tax deductible.

All you have to do is send a cheque to the Treasurer, made payable to Kolot Mayim Reform Temple. It may be left in the Kolot Mayim folder at the JCC, or mailed to Kolot Mayim Reform Temple at the JCC of Victoria, 3636 Shelbourne Avenue, Victoria, BC, V8P 4H2.

Donations made during the past month:

Jacqueline and Sheldon Seigel

Julie Elizabeth - to the Rabbi's Fund

Arlette Baker - to the Social Action Committee Fund



Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman sews the Torah scroll to the etz chaim (wooden roller) while Soferet Rachel Reichardt and Rabbi Rachel Schoenfeld hold the roller steady. This is for the Women's Torah that you read about in last month's [Voice](#).

Torah Study

has been suspended
until the Fall of
2011/5772.

If you would like to sponsor an issue of **The Voice**, please contact **Julie Elizabeth** at 250-388-4161 or email her at [<madrona623@telus.net>](mailto:madrona623@telus.net).

Sponsorship costs \$100.00, is tax deductible, and covers our printing and mailing costs ONLY.

The Sixth Night of Channukah

The Union for Reform Judaism, in partnership with other Jewish Organizations has created "*Ner Shel Tzedakah*" – an interdenominational programme to raise public awareness, and educate the Jewish community about poverty, during the Chanukah season. *Ner Shel Tzedakah* is planned for the 6th night of Chanukah. On this night, we encourage families to teach their children about the needs of those less fortunate, and to donate the value of the gifts they would ordinarily exchange (or the gifts themselves) to local or national organizations assisting the poor. The process in creating this donation can itself be a fun and engaging family mitzvah project. The Social Action Committee of Kolot Mayim has decided to offer your generous donations to the Jewish Family Services of Victoria. **Please bring your donations to our Kabbalat Shabbat Service on Friday December 10th.**

The 6th night of Chanukah is also a time when communities might organize programs that highlight poverty in the Jewish and general communities.

A blessing to recite on the 6th night of Chanukah: *Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam, Asher Kidshanu B'mitzvotav, V'limdeinu L'Hadlik Ner Shel Tzedakah. Blessed are You, Eternal, our God, who makes us holy through the performance of Mitzvot, and inspires us to light the Candle of Righteousness.*

As we light this *Ner Shel Tzedakah* tonight, we pray that its light will shine into the dark corners of our world, bringing relief to those suffering from the indignity and pain that accompany poverty. May our act of giving inspire others to join with us in the fight against the scourge of hunger, homelessness, need and want. Together, let us raise our voices to cry out for justice and may that clarion call burst through the night's silence and declare that change must come.



WANDERING J E W S

Sardinia and Corsica: A Jewish Experience?

Ann and I have recently returned from parts of Italy and France not normally on the tourist path for North Americans, but very popular with Europeans. What we did was mostly decadent — driving around the northeast corner of Sardinia (known as the Costa Smerelda), looking at the incredibly beautiful coast line with its strange rock formations and abundant white sandy beaches, poking around large and small Italian villages, eating predictably wonderful Italian food based largely on

the bounty of the sea, and generally indulging ourselves with a gentle, non-pressured holiday. Strangely, for Italy, we entered no museums, saw no great art and sculpture, and encountered no phenomenal ancient architecture. Did we care? Not this trip.

Corsica was a different experience, first, because it was French; second, because it is a more verdant island, and, finally, because its rich medieval history is so obviously just there at the top of chalk cliffs overlooking Bonifacio harbour. We were more active there because there was more to see and do in the short two and a half days we had allocated to Corsica. We had a ball and we would go back in a minute.

In the seventeen days we were away, we saw no other Jews, saw no synagogues, saw no evidence of Jewish habitation or culture. I found this disappointing, and both of us were surprised to note how much we have come to depend on the comfortable constancy of our Jewish experience in Victoria, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and further points east and south.

And, yet, for me, the trip was a transformative experience in the Jewish part of me. Born in 1935, I was 10 years old when WW II ended, and only 14 when the State of Israel was born. I developed, and maintained, an attitude toward the German people; I just didn't want to be around them or to participate in what I perceived as a predominantly German milieu. I would not describe it as a customary prejudice — I harboured no ill will toward Germans and did not think of them in stereotypic ways — but I could not feel comfortable in a German ambience.

So, on our journey, it happened that over 90 % of the other tourists were German. What did I learn? At a feeling level — this is where the learning happened — I found that I remained uncomfortable with Germans my age or older. I could not

[Continued on page 8.](#)

The Victoria and Vancouver Island Jewish Burial Society

The Jewish Burial Society of Victoria and Vancouver Island is a service organization founded to assist all Jews with end of life requirements. We administer four totally separate and distinct sections in the Hatley Memorial Gardens and provide space for all persuasions of Jewish life from orthodox to secular, complete with cremation if specified.

The Society works with the Victoria Chevrah Kadisha in preparation of the body for burial, and works with the family in all ways to ensure that the bereaved person feels the embrace and concern of the entire community.

While we are a non profit Society, regretfully, end of life does not respect one's pocketbook, and costs are dear. There is a small membership charge that must be paid to become a member of our Society, and arrangements for this, and for burial requirements may be made at any time. We recommend dealing with one's self and saving the pain and expense of the survivors at a very stressful time.

For additional information on a highly confidential basis, call Joel Fagan (250 477-2006), Jack Shalinsky (250 477-1012), or Michael Goldberg (250 598-9094).



Grand Prize:

Beautiful original Israeli



Hadassah-WIZO Annual Channukah Raffle!

Tickets – \$5.00 each or three for \$10.00!

Drawing December 4th at Channukah Party.
You do not have to be present to win.

Tickets may be purchased at the Channukah party
or by contacting Ana Porzecanski at 250-595-2687



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dolphin

**Other
Great**



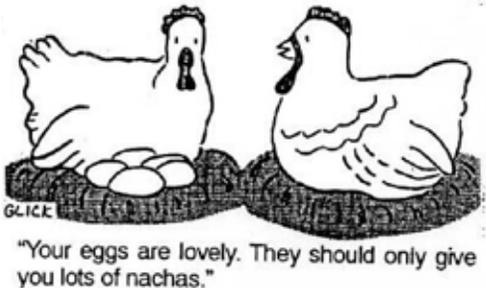
White ceramic
teapot
with cosy with

We were fortunate, on Friday November 26th, to have **Rabbi Sarah Newmark** from Gig Harbour, WA., lead our Kabbalat Shabbat Service. Rabbi Newmark has most recently lectured about the history of women in the rabbinate at Kadima in Seattle. She is a very warm and knowledgeable woman, who also sings beautifully!

For our service, she discussed the meaning of Kabbalat Shabbat, and the reason for the five psalms leading up to the welcoming of the Sabbath Bride with the singing of L'ha Dodi. As such, we learned some new, beautiful melodies.

For her Drash, she spoke about Joseph, bringing his story to modern times, and intermeshing it with a remembrance of a Channukah spent in Jerusalem. I think we all came away from that service with a wish to visit Israel at Channukah time in order to witness the glow of the lit menorahs in every store front. How beautiful it must have be! Rabbi Newmark's only regret was that she forgot to bring her coat of many colours for our service!

When Jenny got up to give the announcements, she told Rabbi Sarah that she could come back any time! I would heartily second that invitation, as I think, would everyone who attended.



Tzedakah: A way of life.

Kolot Mayim Supports Food Bank

Please bring food donations for the James Bay Community Project Food Bank to the JCC on Friday nights. We have a beautiful box for your contributions, which are deeply appreciated. Packaged goods as well as produce are welcomed.

Donations of cans of beans and soup are especially needed.

For more information, please contact Reva Hutkin, 388-4161, or Ann Gougeon-Ryant, 384-9351.

Sardinia and Corsica, Continued from page 6. not prevent myself from wondering about them and their family members during the war and about whether or not, and to what extent, they were contributors to the Shoah. I also found, and to my great delight, that with younger (those under 50) Germans, I felt as comfortable as I would have felt with any other tourists. With them, my mind did not turn to the horrors of the Holocaust. I merely assumed them to be part of a repentant generation.

We easily befriended a young couple (they could have been our children) from Munich and chose to dine with them for four consecutive nights. We exchanged photographs and took each other's pictures. Could I have predicted this? Surely not.

So, I learned something of the complexity of the experience of being Jewish. It's in our head but it is also in our body. We think what we think and we feel what we feel. In the process of change, it is hard to know what will lead – head or heart. Being open to life allows it to be either.

Joe Gougeon-Ryant

Ethical Implications of Ma'oz Tzur, continued from page 1. Is it not possible to mark a holiday or to live a life that celebrates our freedom without seeking vengeance on our former oppressors?

Perhaps it could be argued that having such a text actually serves a healthy and cathartic service. The song can be viewed as an opportunity for a redirection of national anger and as an outlet for our vengeful emotions, allowing us the opportunity to sublimate the desire to physically jar, those who have oppressed. However, a text such as this is not an isolated incident in our tradition. Expressions, prayers, and songs that ask God to wreak violence on our behalf appear throughout our liturgy, tradition, and holiday texts. Daily in the traditional *Amidah*, three times a day, we praise a God who "breaks enemies and subdues scoundrels," and we ask God to "destroy God's enemies, who rise up against us to be struck down before them." Thus, rather than sublimate a desire for physical aggression, does the repetition of such ideas in our liturgy

encourage, affirm, or instigate violence toward those who once oppressed us, even when we are free?

When confronted with such texts in our liturgy _ for those of us who find such texts uncomfortable or abhorrent — there are a variety of possible responses. We can rationalize their existence as an outgrowth of the time in which they were created, when physical anti-Semitism was rampant. We can counterbalance them with a textual tradition that is peace-

Ethical Implications, cont'd. from page 8. loving and accepting of our enemies, such as "Who is a hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend" (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan*)."* We can reinterpret "the enemy," by psychoanalyzing the external enemy into an internal enemy. Or perhaps we can do nothing. What are the ethical implications if we acknowledge and welcome into our tradition the existence of vengeful, violent war-loving texts, that pray to a God who slaughters our enemies and who kills on our behalf? How can it be that these prayers have their place alongside the prayers in our liturgy for peace, justice, forgiveness, and compassion or that uttering both kinds of prayers is part of the inner spiritual life of a Jew? It seems that the journey to let both traditions live within us is part of our religious process. Can we allow ourselves to dwell with the discomfort and to accept it into ourselves? Furthermore, how does it affect the way we treat others and live our lives?

To accept a vengeful God alongside a compassionate and forgiving God requires us to accept a more complicated inner life, a spiritual life that is not black and white but is complex and nuanced. It demands our responsibility, good judgement, and sincere critical thinking. It exhorts us to think sensitively when we call upon God and reflect thoughtfully when we consider which image of God we turn to. There are ethical implications to believing in a vengeful and violent God alongside a compassionate and peace-loving God, and they obligate us to live a life of tremendous accountability. For how could we ever truly know when it is right to pray for the death of another human being?

*A commentary on *Pirkei Avot* ("Ethics of our Fathers"), probably composed in the late 3rd century.

Taken from *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Winter Holidays*

by Paul Steinberg. Edited by Janet Greenstein Potter. JPS Philadelphia. 2007.

People in the News

David Torontow has recently celebrated his 80th birthday. David is in better shape than a lot of 40-year-olds. This summer, they will be off on back-to-back Arctic adventures.

Jessi Simpson is now officially engaged to her Steve. Momma Jenny Laing, is ecstatic.

Ann and Joe are off soon to Seattle for a weekend break and while there will visit the Picasso exhibition. **Lesley Wicks** will be their travel companion.

The Fagans are recently returned from La Jolla, California, and Austin, Texas.

The Kadonoffs are recently returned from a river cruise that took them through Vienna, Bucharest and further points east. Glad to report that Bob is doing well.

The Shalinskys are even more recently returned from Phoenix.

Get ready for a catered congregational Seder, again coordinated by the estimable pair, **Alec and Rennie**, with the JCC once again our venue. Mark April 20th on your calendar.

Ooh la la! That's what folks are saying about **Raffi Beck's** new car!

Klaus Benker's back injury has recovered well enough for him to be back at work but not so well that he can help out the BC Lions

Don Sher still celebrates American Thanksgiving. How good is that!

Hadassah-WIZO Annual Chanukah Party

Our not-to-be-missed
"Festival of Lights" celebration

will start at
6pm on
Saturday December 4, 2010

at the home of
Ana and Alex Porzecanski,
2391 Beach Drive.





Those We Remember ...

2010 Obs'd Date	Civil Date of Death	Hebrew Date of Death	Name	Relationship	Mourner
Dec. 1	Dec. 1994	Unknown	Anna Duchin	Grandmother	Marla Yacowar
Dec. 1	Dec. 1, 1999	23 Kislev 5760	Morris Hanson	Father	Anne Hanson-Finger
Dec. 3	Dec. 3, 2004	20 Kislev 5765	James Jardine	Brother	June Kadanoff
Dec. 3	Dec. 2, 2008	5 Kislev 5768	Lois Yake	Mother	Elizabeth Yake
Dec. 10	Dec. 10, 1991	3 Tevet 5762	Kevin Coleman	Husband	Michele Butot
Dec. 10	Dec. 10, 2001	25 Kislev 5762	John Parrish	Father	Rennie Parrish
Dec, 11	Dec. 11, 2008	14 Kislev 5769	Zen Glesby	Friend	Congregation
Dec. 11	Dec. 11, 2007	2 Tevet 5768	Kathy O'Connell	Sister	Dan O'Connell
Dec. 12	Dec. 12, 1971	24 Kislev 5732	Mildred Shnay	Mother	Frederica Bowden
Dec. 14	Dec. 14, 2006	23 Kislev 5767	Jim Storey	Step-father	Martin Hergt
Dec. 17	Jan. 3, 1993	10 Tevet 5753	Nathan Kadanoff	Father	Bob Kadanoff
Dec. 17	Dec. 17, 1999	8 Tevet 5760	Nancy Mundinger	Sister	Julie Elizabeth
Dec. 17	Dec. 17, 2009	30 Kislev 5770	Margo Cummings	Cousin	Rennie Parrish
Dec. 18	Dec. 18, 2005	17 Kislev 5766	Gertrude Laing	Grandmother	Jenny Laing
Dec. 23	Dec. 23, 1008	26 Kislev 5769	Max Spigelman	Father	Steven Spigelman
Dec. 24	Dec. 24, 2002	19 tevet 5763	Marlene Gordon	Mother	Hugh Gordon
Dec. 26	Dec. 26, 2004	14 Tevet 5765	Henri Cunow	Life Partner	Lesley Wicks
Dec. 27	Dec. 27, 1995	4 Tevet 5756	Ruth Haidt	Mother	Wendy Rolph
Dec. 28	Dec. 28, 1987	7 Tevet 5748	Michael Kelley	Foster brother	Jenny Laing
Dec. 29	Jan. 11, 1980	22 Tevet 5740	Edward Quinn	Father	Susan Halpert

**Three unique
Tzedakah Boxes**



Havdallah

Julie and Reva's new Havdallah set has arrived! We would like to make the celebration of Havdallah a weekly ritual. Everyone is welcome to join us, but please call first. 250-388-4161

We live at 2222A Arbutus Road
at Gordon Hedad.

December 2010

Kislev-Tevet 5771

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 24	2 25	3 26 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat Service	4 27 Mikeitz
10:00 Ctty Chan- nukah Party 5 28	6 29	7 30	8 1 Tevet Rosh Chodesh	9 2	10 3 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat Service	11 4 Vayigash
12 5 10:00 Rel. Sch.	13 6	14 7	15 8	16 9	17 10 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat Service	18 11 Vayechi
19 12 10:00 Rel. Sch. Cultural Arts	20 13	21 14	22 15	23 16	24 17 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat Service	25 18 Shemot
26 19 10:00 Rel. Sch.	27 20	28 21	29 22	30 23	31 24	

White squares represent dates that Rabbi Jane will be with us.

Parshas are in red type.

*Oh Hannukah , Oh Hannukah,
Come light the Menorah....*



Jewish Community Hannukah Party

Sunday December 5th, 10 a.m. til noon

**at the JCCV 3636 Shelbourne
\$2 / pp Kids under 4 are FREE**



Dear Friends,

Congregation Emanu-El with support of the greater Jewish community, is organizing a gathering and walk this Chanukah, to celebrate an integral theme of Chanukah, the Festival of Light: the light of religious freedom.

Please join us in honouring the light of religious tolerance and diversity here in Victoria. We will meet at Spirit Square aka Centennial Square at 5:30 pm on Sunday December 5, 2010, and walk together down Government Street to Legislature, holding light sticks symbolizing the light of religious freedom. There, in front of our democratic parliament buildings, we will stand together as neighbors, brothers and sisters and join in lighting a large Chanukah Menorah.

This is an opportunity for our different communities to connect in a spirit of joy and sharing. For me this event is a natural extension of our previous gathering in silence for the sake of peace. I hope to see you there.

B'virkat Shalom- with blessings for peace and wholeness,

Rabbi Harry Brechner

