



בר'אשית

783

Vol. VIII. No. 2

Bereshith: "In the Beginning"

5746 Kislev/Nov. 1985

CHANNUKAH VERSUS CHRISTMAS

(A Guide to Warding off Dat Ol' Debbil Ambivalence)

There is a story (no doubt apocryphal) that when Pope John XXIII issued the encyclical which nullified the prohibition against eating meat on Friday, he received a letter from his mother which said:

Dear Johnny,
Thanks for fixing it so I can eat meat on Friday. Now see if you can fix it so I don't feel guilty.

Or - as a sage once said, "A custom comes before a law."

In Assimilationland, where I was brought up, there was one -- and only one, end-of-the-year holiday. This holiday was customarily announced 6 weeks or so ahead of its actual December 25th date by spangled, dazzling letters which were hung across the main street in our little Pennsylvania town, and by large full color illuminated bas-relief likenesses of Father Christmas (a.k.a. Santa Claus) on every lamp post.

(cont. p.2)



THIS WAS NO ORDINARY SHABBOS MEAL

"That's really something, no?" his eyes glimmered. My father's eyes rarely glimmered. "This is the first time I'm using it since..." He held the yarmulke close to my face. "Look at the writing inside," he urged softly. My father's Polish accent cracks me open everytime. I took the yarmulke in my hand and tried to make out the chipped white letters inside the rim. Through squinted eyes I read, "Gerald Margolis's Bar Mitzvah, November 4, 1958". "I was just a kid when you went to that Bar Mitzvah," I said. "A pip squeak!" he added.

I vaguely remembered the boy, except that he was the son of one of my father's friends from his childhood in Europe. (cont. p.4)

A LETTER TO "SARAH"

The following letter was contributed anonymously by a bal tshuva whose sister, "Sarah," a secular Jew, recently announced her engagement to "Dan," a Gentile. The names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Dear Sarah,

There is something I want to tell you, but I don't know exactly how. I am very happy that you have found the man whom you love, who loves you. I think Dan will be a good husband to you and a good father to your children, probably for the same reasons that you do.

What I'd like to know, Sarah, is whether
(cont. p.5)

In the soul of every Jew there burns an identity light (and I believe this to be true), mine, already in those Hitler years turned down to a very low flame, diminished even more at Christmastime. As soon as the beguiling street decorations went up, my Jewishness went down. Oh G-d, I fiercely wanted to be like the majority of kids in that town, to camouflage (what I to cherish) my apartness. My only resistance to the prevailing mode took place whenever we sang Christmas carols in school. What I did was secretly hum when the words demanded that the name of Their Saviour be sung. ("Hm-hm, the Lord" was how I sang it. Even I had limits!)

Otherwise I fell right in step with my button-nosed, pork-eating idols, who leaped out of their beds on Christmas morning and sped into the living room to see what Santa had brought them.

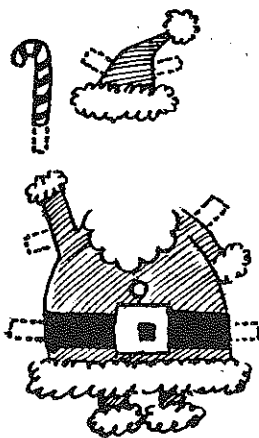
In hopes of redemption, I hereby confess to having (a) trimmed Christmas trees; (b) attended midnight Mass at a succession of non-synagogues; (c) fantasized excessively about cornering under the mistletoe golden-maned non-Jewish women wearing tight red and green sweaters; (d) married (the first time) an assimilated woman who brought a Christmas tree into our home each Dec. 24, calling it a "Channukah bush". Enough violations of the law to have got me stoned to death way back when.

Now all these years (and therapy sessions) later, a member of the Beginners' Minyan, I have purged my infidelities, and my soul-flame burns brighter and brighter.

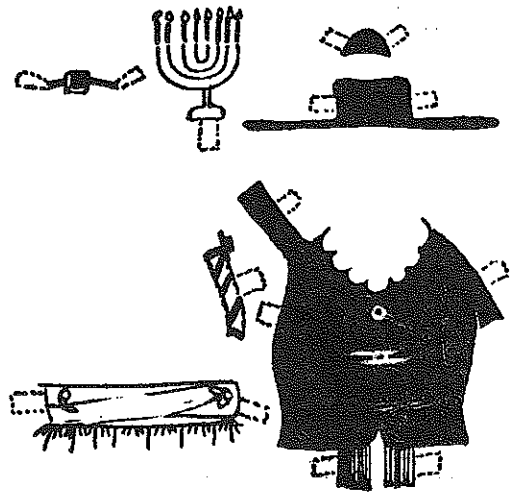
But, as the sage said, "A custom comes before a law." So, when holiday time rolls around in December, the old apostacy sometimes blows through my insides, attempting to make the soul-flame flicker. What do I do at these times? I take out my trusty "Dress-The-Zayde-Holiday-Paper-Doll Kit."

WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?

Column "A"



Column "B"



One can see that it's easier to dress the Zayde in the effects from Column A than in those from Column B.

But there is a reward if you choose the harder task, namely that your sense of self snaps back into focus so others may observe your apartness. (The very thing which brought discomfort to the headstrong boy I was, fighting to deny my identity.)

Take out your scissors (unless you are reading this on Shabbat) and cut yourself in on the comforting warmth you feel as your soul-flame automatically goes from "simmer" to "broil" adding illumination to the lovely candles in the Zayde's upraised fist.

And when the Lord's name comes along in the holiday song, shout it out loud and clear along with me.

ACTING NOTES ON DAVENING

"It has been laid down in the Talmud and Codes that meditation is not valid in lieu of verbal articulation, so that if one has recited the Shema only in his mind and heart...he is required to recite it again (orally). Similarly with grace after meals...and with prayer. On the other hand, if he has uttered them with his lips but did not intend with his heart, he has fulfilled his obligation ex post facto, and he is not required to repeat them, except for the first verse of the Shema and the first benediction of the Amidah."

*Likutei Amarim-Tanya Chap. 38

Wed. Shacharis

Said first verse three times. First time I heard my voice only imitating the tone and rhythm of the crowd. Second time, improvement, but I was still distracted. I tried closing my eyes in addition to covering them. Out of nowhere an image sprang into mind. I was in a rehearsal room with people I knew, teachers, actresses, actors, some friends. I was standing on a chair. -- When I said the first verse, it came out softer but more directed and with a hushed urgency. I continued davening.

Thurs. Schaharis

The phrase, v'eeyoon tefillah (concentrating on the meaning of prayers), jumped out at me. While my experience yesterday brought meaning to my prayer what resemblance did it have to "a testimony of Hashem's Oneness in awe and reverence." Today I kept it simple, no images. I settled for my first try but had a faint feeling it was more like testimony before a traffic court than a heavenly . . . Have to analyze what it is "to testify".

Fri. Shacharis

Out of sync with the minyan, as usual. I should pause when they say kaddish. For the second day in a row I was interrupted at the phrase, layvav shalame (perfect heart). This depressed me and I began to crazily doubt my Jewishness. I read thoughts in the facial expression of the Rabbi and others in the mostly older minyan like, "Who are you trying to kid with that goyishe kop?", "What kind of Jew has blue eyes and blonde hair?", "We've heard the missionaries will go to any lengths." Five pages went by in hurried Hebrew without a glance or thought of the meaning until I began to rid myself of the painful fantasy which caused an intense heat in my upper chest, neck and head. When I reached the blessings before Shema I was close to tears. Ahava Raba pushed me over the edge and I said the Shema wet-faced and emotionally drained but with a certain clarity. The emotional wave had left a gift in its wake. I continued davening in a highly relaxed state, much more open and aware. I found I could see the translations at the same time I said the words and I began to "play", making whole sentences, making sense in two languages at once. Triumphant praise started to sound like triumphant praise, impassioned pleas were expressed as impassioned pleas and blessings became brochos. It was exhilarating, really very satisfying and special...to me. Was it a step closer to Your will Hashem?

Maariv

This morning was really amazing in a way. My cockamamie mishegoss changed my davening. It had its own internal drama that involved questions of identity and purpose, screwy as they were, it was a strength, a strong prayer I'm sure. I want to reconsider these personal images.

R . Jewish Meditation by Aryeh Kaplan, he says there is a Talmudic injunction against saying the Shema repetitively. Means I have to achieve full state energy and consciousness at beginning of service.

(cont. p.6)

(cont. from p.1) SHABBOS MEAL

He carefully placed the frayed cloth on his head. He gave its sides an awkward tug. The shiny cloth bowl seemed to fill with air and rise above his bald spot. A hard, almost foolish grin pushed against his boney cheeks. He looked to me like a Jewish Emmett Kelly. My father was about to make Friday night Kiddush for the first time in our lives together. I didn't trust this moment. I knew, on the other side of the levity crouched pain.

The day before, I had boarded a train for my parents' home in the Promised Land II -- Florida. I needed Amtrak's "Silver Streak" to rock-a-bye my anxieties about seeing them. I welcomed the timeless feel as the train breezed through infinite fields of wheat. I arrived on Friday morning. The Florida sun felt oppressive as I made my way through the crowded station. There was no mistaking my parents' faces. They were the heaviest faces there. We hugged hello, got into the gleaming-white Lincoln Continental marshmallow, and we were off:

My parents live in a community where palm trees bend low like the people who live there. Orange-red-yellow flowers blaze. Black driveways are lined with sleek pastel cars. Aqua blue swimming pools await a splash, and blood scarred Holocaust survivors parade in Nike sweat suits, Adidas sneakers, and sad leather faces.

"I found some old Manischewitz in the closet. This should be good, no?" My father was trying so hard. It hurt me to watch. He recited "...boray pri ha'gofen," and drank. I wanted to tell him there was an introductory prayer, but chose to keep my mouth shut. I didn't want to rustle the tension between us.



My mother stood in the hallway watching us. She crossed her barrier to drop two plates of chicken in front of my father and me, then quickly resumed her huddled position in the false safety of the dark. Her husband chose to tread upon this dangerous territory and seemed to be having too good a time to stop. He bit into his chicken leg and in mid-swallow said, "Mala, come sit with us!" I wasn't sure I wanted her terrified presence at the table. I was having enough trouble with my father's unusual amiability. "No, no, I'm all right. You want some gefilte fish maybe?" She took instant refuge in the kitchen and it was my father and me again. "I'd like to go to shul tomorrow. Are there any around here?" I asked my father, in the most matter-of-fact voice I could manage.

"You want shul too? Shabbos is a day of rest. Rest with your parents. You're only staying four days."

"Three," I corrected.

"Okay, three! More reason you should stay with the old folks."

"Let her go to shul!" came a voice from the hallway contingent.

My father crossed his arms and held them tightly against his chest. He was containing something. Something more than his arms could hold. "You come to Florida to spend in shul? To light candles, to aggravate your mother..." his arms swept the air above the table, "to make...to force on us, this?"

The anger took control of his face.

"Please, Michael." My mother moved closer to pull him away from the smoke. It was too late. He stood above me and choked on his next word. I couldn't make out what he said but the power of his rage shook the room and tipped my stress threshold. I had trespassed on forbidden ground. It was a cold, black, scary place and I was stuck. His finger drilled the air in my direction. "Get out then! You want to leave, so go!"

My mother could not stop nor slow down my father's emotional hurricane. I don't think she wanted to. He was also speaking for her. She leaned against the front door and wept without tears. My father's eyes were locked open, dry with fury. I sat behind my plate of cold chicken, 117 lbs. of guilt breaking a hole in my chair. (Even the chicken looked betrayed.) This was no ordinary Shabbos meal.

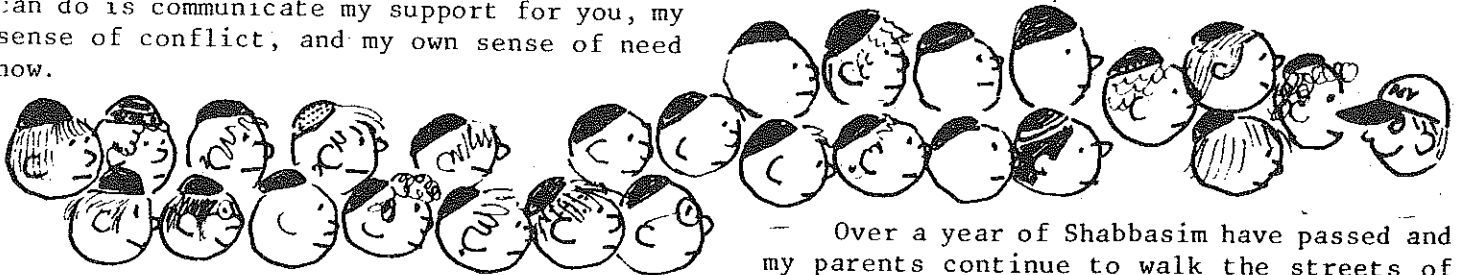
(cont. p.5)

(cont. from p.1) "SARAH"

you'd tolerate for a moment my desire to influence you (and Dan possibly) to become aware of Jewish traditions that may affect your marriage. Would it somehow not drive you crazy if I had a desire to see you more observant, to see if that could make you and Dan and your children happy? As a separate question, would you allow me a role in introducing your children to Judaism?

I am reluctant to ask these questions, but I think they are worthy of our attention. If they are to be asked at all, I think they must be brought up now.

At the same time, I feel caught between my desire for you to be happy in your marriage with Dan, my own need to absolve my own conscience that I have done right by you, and my own deeply felt desire to share with you the important occasions I look forward to in my new "observant" lifestyle. On the one hand, I have an impulse to be silent about these questions, for fear that you might take offense at my intrusiveness. But acting merely out of fear is a path I no longer hold very much respect for. On the other hand, it would be equally reprehensible (and ludicrous) for me to try to force my values onto you, Dan and your children. The best thing I can do is communicate my support for you, my sense of conflict, and my own sense of need now.



(cont. from p.4) SHABBOS MEAL

The pretty lace tablecloth, chicken smell, the red wine and the yarmulke formed a picture for my parents that mirrored a very old vision, more acute than the one in this dining room. My parents' memories of Friday nights are buried under layers and layers of emotional defenses. By creating this scene, had I set my parents up to make them confront these buried feelings?

That night I forgot how to sleep. I felt the power of pure regret drive through the center of my stomach. I was helpless to free my parents of their pain. I took little comfort in the fact that what took place tonight was, indeed, not the source of their tragedy, and that a large part of me really did mean well.

You and Dan make a great team, and have a very potentially adventurous life ahead of you. Yet, a good captain with a good crew and a sound ship also needs good reading on the wind, currents, and the depths of the channel leading into port, to navigate safely. I would like to help you and Dan "navigate safely," if I can. It would seem to me just plain good "seamanship," at least to know what Jewish traditions of marriage and parenting are, and to consider how they may affect you, Dan, and your children (could they possibly enhance your marriage?), even if you do not intend to follow any of them.

Please take me up on this only if you want to find out more about Judaism vis-a-vis your marriage. If you'd rather not right now, just say "no, thank you," and I'll respect you for your candor. I don't need or want you to put yourself(ves) through anything for me on this score. My personal sense of responsibility to you, my sister, to Dan, my future brother-in-law, and to your children, is fulfilled by my having raised these difficult questions to you, and by honoring your reply.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. I love you.

Over a year of Shabbasim have passed and my parents continue to walk the streets of their sunny neighborhood, Adidas and all. A change took place that night. We learned to respect one another. They showed me a part of themselves the rest of the world would never see. I now understand the need for the soft Floridian blanket with which my parents drape their lives. They now appreciate the fulfillment I experience living inside Judaism. My father asks me how my Yomtovim are. My mother sends me kosher treats. She writes: 'Betty dollink, come visit us. I found a kosher butcher and I'll triple wrap the chickens. Come momeleh, we miss you.'

My growing relationship with Yiddishkeit is the place I have found that reflects the depth and beauty within the moral example my parents taught their daughter. They saw beyond their remembered sorrow that night. They saw me.

-Betty S. Jacobs-



BUY THE BANK

A MOST EXCITING DEVELOPMENT!

A new era is beckoning at Lincoln Square Synagogue. By some miracle the Chase Bank building adjacent to our synagogue has become available, and can be purchased for \$1.3 million (a real "steal" according to New York real estate mavens!)

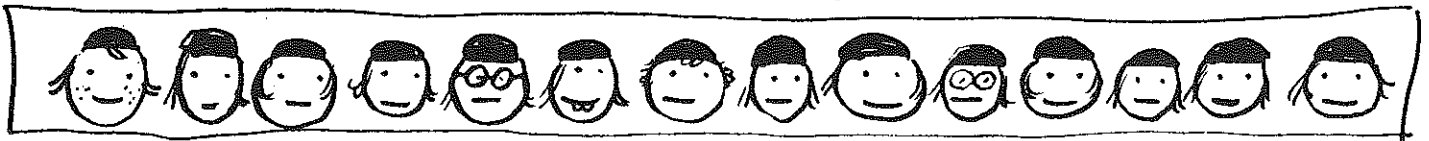
This is an opportunity which we cannot afford to pass up, for it augurs great possibilities. Not only does the purchase of the building imply the availability of desperately needed office and classroom space, a chapel for the Beginners' Service, and other basic amenities. But it may also make possible the realization of a dream to reach out to hundreds more people, and to inspire other Jewish institutions throughout the country to reach out to novice worshippers and Jews with little or no background.

I have, in my day, made many appeals to the members of our service -- for Torah study, observance of mitzvot, higher standards of moral behavior, but never for money. It is a sacred duty to give Tzedakah. According to Jewish law one must tithe one's annual income. Aidel and I make certain each year that our charity contributions exceed the 10% minimum, and our family has established a special fund which has afforded many beginners the opportunity to study in Yeshiva or in Israel, make their homes kosher, receive a religious divorce or proper circumcision. We regard this not as an obligation, but as a wonderful opportunity. Why not? After all, our rabbis tell us that if one desires to become wealthy -- give charity! So we give. And we feel extremely blessed, for the return has far exceeded the cost.

The response to the initial appeal made at the Beginners' Service has been overwhelming. Tens of thousands of dollars have been donated by congregants who joined us only in recent months, and many old-timers have been exceedingly generous.

What more can I say? If you think ours is a cause worthy of your support -- please help us. Whatever you contribute will be greatly appreciated, and we hope to live up to the faith you have placed in us.

In Friendship,
Ephraim



(cont. from p.3) ACTING NOTES

Found a Mishnah in Pirkei Avos that supports my theory that acting is the best way to improve and judge one's davening. "He used to say: He who is pleasing to his fellow men is pleasing also to G-d, but he who is not pleasing to men is displeasing to G-d." from chap. 3. If one's davening could please an audience of serious theatergoers, it's good, and we're talking New York audiences.

Wed. Shacharis

Kept physically still today for most of the service and noticed general improvement. As onstage, outer stillness led to inner stillness and realizations surfaced.

I thought I saw my father on the other side of the shul, turned out to be someone else. This experience is so fraught with feelings of loneliness and alienation from one's family and friends. I should remember that next time I am impatient with friends who are taking things on slower than I.



CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZEL TOV

WITHIN -----

Divorced
Leah Abrams
I think
Marjorie Seaberg -
remarried

NEW DATE
BEGINNERS' MINYAN
February 23, 1986
Details forthcoming

ENGAGEMENTS

Leah Abrams to Joshua Marcus
Lisa Adler to Jerry Bernard
Barbara Berson to Ed Weinberg
Emma Buroztyl to Jeff Leibowitz
Dr. Judith Deutsch to Marc Kornblatt
Marilyn Hamburg to Zvi Grossman
Meira Ptashnik to Tom Fleish
Iris Schoen to Ira Abramowitz
Marjorie Seaberg to Alex Gelman
Eileen Trager to David Rosen

MARRIAGES

Hollis Rosenthal to Avraham Dorman

BIRTHS

Susan and Bruce Fein on the birth of a son, JARED ALEXANDER
Debbie and Allan Frederick on the birth of a son, SHMUEL MICHAEL
Anca and Sergiu Klainerman on the birth of a son, ARIEL MARK
Rosalina and Michael Platzer on the birth of a daughter, SARAH RACHEL
Sema and Rabbi Mordechai Reich on the birth of a son, SHALOM MOSHE

BAR MITZVAH

Yitzchak (Irving) Centor

BAT MITZVAH

Dahlia Kaufman

CONDOLENCES

Rabbi Saul Berman on the passing of his beloved mother, REIZL BERMAN.
Phyllis Nevins on the passing of her beloved mother, ROSE BROWER.
Fay Shapiro on the passing of her beloved father, LEO ALTMAN.

REFUAH SH'LAIMAH (speedy recovery)

Eliora Ellen Seligson

TZETCHEM L'SHALOM (To live and/or study in Israel)

Lisa Green
Joan Kaufman
Marsha and Jonathan Weisman

THANK YOU

David Gordon for the wonderful posters he has created for our service.
Paul Kaufman for setting up the Beginners' kiddush with devotion for so many years.

APARTMENT AVAILABLE
for Shomer Shabbat
Furnished 1 bedroom in Riverdale
thru March '86 \$650/mo.
212-247-8271



Bereshith: "In the Beginning" is put together under the direction of Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, Educational Director of Lincoln Square Synagogue 200 Amsterdam Avenue, New York. A special Beginners' Minyan is held each Shabbat morning at 9:15 A.M. at the synagogue. Through its Joseph Shapiro Institute, Lincoln Square offers a number of adult education courses in Judaica.

Readers: This is your newsletter and we would like to hear from you. Article contributions are most welcome!

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Friday, December 13 (Rosh Chodesh Eve)
 Kindle 6 Channukah Candles 4:05 P.M.
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:11 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:20 P.M.
 Oneg Shabbat 8:30 P.M.

Saturday, December 14 (Miketz)
 Shabbat Channukah
 Shabbat Morning Service 8:45 P.M.
 Talmud and Bible classes 3:25 P.M.
 Mincha 4:10 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 4:25 P.M.

Friday, December 20
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:13 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:25 P.M.
 Oneg Shabbat 8:30 P.M.

Saturday, December 21 (Vayigash)
 Shabbat Morning Service 8:45 A.M.
 Talmud and Bible classes 3:30 P.M.
 Mincha 4:15 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 4:25 P.M.

Sunday, December 22 (Asara B'Tevet)
 Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 A.M.
 Mincha 4:15 P.M.

Friday, December 27
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:17 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:30 P.M.
 Oneg Shabbat 8:30 P.M.

Saturday, December 28 (Vayechi)
 Shabbat Morning service 8:45 A.M.
 Talmud and Bible Classes 3:30 P.M.
 Mincha 4:15 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 4:30 P.M.

Wednesday, January 1/New Year's Day
 Morning Services 7:15 and 8:30 A.M.

Friday, January 3
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:23 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:35 P.M.
 Oneg Shabbat 8:30 P.M.

Saturday, January 4 (Shemote)
 Shabbat Morning Service 8:45 A.M.
 Talmud and Bible Classes 3:40 P.M.
 Mincha 4:25 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 4:35 P.M.

Friday, January 10
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:30 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:40 P.M.

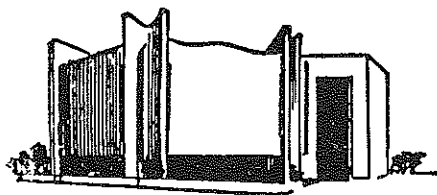
Saturday, January 11 (Vaera)
 (Shabbat Rosh Chodesh)
 Shabbat Morning Service 8:45 P.M.
 Talmud and Bible Classes 3:40 P.M.
 Mincha 4:30 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 4:40 P.M.

Friday, January 17
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:37 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:50 P.M.

Saturday, January 18 (Bo)
 Shabbat Morning Service 8:45 A.M.
 Talmud and Bible Classes 3:50 P.M.
 Mincha 4:35 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 4:50 P.M.

Friday, January 24
 Kindle Shabbat Candles 4:46 P.M.
 Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:55 P.M.

Saturday, January 25 (Beshalach)
 Shabbat Shira/Tu B'Shevat
 Shabbat Morning services 8:45 A.M.
 Talmud and Bible Classes 4:00 P.M.
 Mincha 4:45 P.M.
 Daily Mincha and Maariv 5:00 P.M.



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