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Restoring Community

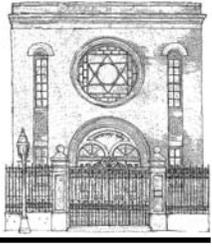
The Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture is on the cusp of making a huge difference in the downtown Jewish community. We are not just the ONLY Jewish historical presence in downtown Boston (besides the Holocaust Memorial), but we are a gateway into the diversity of the Jewish world. People come to The Vilna not only to learn about Jewish historic Boston, but also to be welcomed into an open, inclusive place that fulfills personal choices for growth.

In the past few months, we have been approached by various organizations to "fulfill the needs of the community," creating programs and events "for" and "by" the community. Through private initiatives, and with encouragement from CJP and collaborative organizations, we are focused on "restoring community" and being part of this organic, flexible, communal infrastructure. This new paradigm seeks meaning and belonging in relationships, symbiotically creating a framework that sustains and nourishes its inhabitants.

Our historic synagogue was once a congregation; now The Vilna shares a community. Making Jewish life accessible and significant in a pluralistic, welcoming environment is our vision. Because of the shifting identity landscape in our demographics, "Jewish identity" is no longer imposed upon; instead, Jewish identity is "internally conceived." In this new, technological savvy generation, networking and connections link us all together. Engaging all in this flexible model will deepen involvement with The Vilna as it becomes a gateway into this communal experience. Just looking at our ever expanding programs, the Vilna is facilitating these new connections.

Last fall I wrote about Richard Mintz's tribute and making dreams come true. Yes, Richard Mintz had a dream for restoring The Vilna Shul, Boston Center for Jewish Culture. For him The Vilna was a transmitter of memories...and now...the Vilna is creating new memories. Come engage with us on this extraordinary journey!

Deborah Feinstein
 President of the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture



THE VILNA SHUL

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P The community where Pa prayed when he was a peddler.

Passover reminds us of how Jewish history has been a journey from one place to another. Abraham left the land of his father and moved to what would become the biblical land of Israel. When draught came upon the land, Jacob and his 11 sons moved to Egypt where Joseph had established Egypt as a welcoming place for us, at least for a time. After our years of struggle and slavery, we left Egypt and traveled in the desert until we once again lived in Eretz Yisrael. After the Romans came we had to leave again, and so the story goes until here we are in America. We don't need to move out, but we certainly do move around!

At one point in Boston's history, there was a heavily populated Jewish neighborhood called the West End. From here the Jews of Boston moved to not only Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan but also to other parts of Massachusetts and the country. With all this moving around, they left something—they left The Vilna Shul.

As I have so often been told, this large, vibrant neighborhood is where Pa (Zede) prayed when he was a peddler. These peddlers and push cart men prayed in the Vilna Shul or other places like the North Russell Street Shul, Blossom Street, Chambers Street and in the North End. Later on, they prayed at Beth El and Mishkan Tefila in Roxbury. They experienced Boston as immigrants and grew to form some of the premier Jewish organizations in America. The first Federation (CJP) was founded here, the first Maimonides school was begun here, and the Bureau of Jewish Education established the earliest parameters for Jewish education. Going further, the first Jewish Supreme Court Justice in America lived here as did pioneers in all forms of commerce. They rose to the challenge to make this their home. Today, some of the wealthiest, educated families in America can still remember their roots in the old Jewish communities of Boston. With all this traveling around, what have we brought with us and what have we left behind? We brought with us our history, our culture and our spirituality. What we need to remember is that those immigrants sought a new life but still retained their heritage. The Vilna symbolizes this path.

You are receiving this newsletter because at some point, you visited or otherwise expressed an interest in The Vilna. Perhaps, it was our preservation efforts, perhaps it was a program, or perhaps it was part of your family's history. Whatever the reason, thank you. It is the story of the Jewish community of Boston and with your help we will build a new community. It will support the historical community that was the Jews of Boston and it will create a community based in the authenticity of the past, the vitality of the present and the hope for a strong and vibrant future. Together we will nourish community today and insure an historical, cultural and spiritual community in the future right here on Beacon Hill.

Steven M. Greenberg
Executive Director

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Announcements

We hope you will welcome our new Program Manager at the Vilna, Jessica Antoline. Jessica will be joining us this spring and brings a wealth of experience from her work at the United Way of Central Mass, The Yiddish Book Center in Amherst and the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Poland. She holds a Master's degree from Tufts with a degree in Modern European History and Museum Education. Jessica is fluent in Polish, Russian, German, Spanish and Yiddish.

We are very pleased to announce that Marilyn Okonow, a member of our Board of Directors, has been selected to receive the 2012 Simone Lottor Exceptional Service Award to be presented at the May 22nd JF&CS Board of Directors Annual Meeting.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Programs for Everyone!

Date	Time	Program
4/11/12	12 pm - 1 pm	Understanding your Jewish Artifacts Elizabeth Berman, certified Judaica appraiser, who will evaluate and answer questions about your Jewish artifacts.
4/13/12	5:45 pm - 8:30 pm	Family Shabbat with Rabbi-to-be Adina Allen who will lead a joyful Shabbat evening service for families called Moving Through Passover.
4/16/12	7:30 pm - 10:00 pm	Benefit Concert and Lecture to support the International Music Festival in Vilnius, Lithuania.
4/20/12	7 pm - 10 pm	HOH – Shabbat with Lisa Einstein the grandchild of two Holocaust survivors.
4/22/12	11 am - 1 pm	Michael A. Grodin, M.D. - Professor of Health Law , Bioethics and Human Rights “What do the Torah, Talmud, Codes and Responsa come to teach us about moral dilemmas and problematic decision making in modern medicine
4/28/12	7:30 pm - 10:30 pm	Hebrew Chant & Sh'ma Yoga festival Part of a weekend long program.
5/6/12	11 am - 1 pm	Health Care, where are we now? with Dr. Michael Chernew, professor at Harvard Medical School, a member of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, the Commonwealth Foundation on a High Performance Health Care System, and the Congressional Budget Office Panel of Health Advisers.
5/9/12	12 pm - 1 pm	Understanding your Jewish Artifacts with Elizabeth Berman
5/13/12	11 am - 1 pm	The Remarkable Jewish Women of Boston; Lecture and Discussion
5/18/12	7 pm - 10 pm	HOH - Friday Night Learning Service and Tenth Anniversary Celebration.
5/26/12	9 pm - 1 am	Shavuot Learning Event—Details to follow
6/1/12	6 pm - 10 pm	Family Shabbat with Rabbi to be Micah Shapiro. A thumping, bumping and rhythmic Shabbat experience for adults and children.
6/3/12	11 am - 5 pm	Beacon Hill Art Walk—We are open for tours on this day when residents open up their private gardens, alleyways and courtyards and allow artists to display and sell their artwork.
6/13/12	12 pm - 1 pm	Understanding your Jewish Artifacts with Elizabeth Berman
6/15/12	7 pm - 10 pm	HOH - Friday Night Learning Service
6/24/12	11 am - 11:45 am	The Children's Summer Jewish Program: The Beacon—a drama, music, games and circus program for children ages 3 - 6 on Sunday 6/24, 7/1, 7/8, 7/15, 7/22, 7/29, 8/5

Save The Date!

Thursday October 4, 2012

When we will honor Jonathan D. Sarna and Ellen Smith with the Zvi Cohen Award.

Become a Member Today!!

It is easy to see why we all take pride in and can get behind what is happening these days at The Vilna. Our focus is to Preserve the Experiences of past generations, Establish meaningful connections to the present, and Develop pathways to an enduring Jewish identity for the future. Quite simply, we want to foster awareness & inspire historical, cultural and spiritual connections. We do all this through education, programming, community partnerships, exhibitions, and the celebration of holidays and life cycle events.

Keep this connection growing. We would be honored if you would become an "official friend" of The Vilna Shul through Membership. Join us as we build a strong community who support our programs, projects and mission— and participate in the many Vilna Shul offerings.

Please take a look at the enclosed membership card and become a member or renew your membership today.

Havurah on the Hill—Aliyahs

The original meaning of "aliyah" was "to ascend" as in "go up to Jerusalem," especially during the three pilgrimage festivals. During those ancient ascents to Jerusalem, especially from Jericho, the Psalms of Ascent, Psalms 120 to 134, were sung. Since then, "aliyah" has come to mean ascending spiritually, ascending up to the bimah, and immigrating to or visiting Israel. During the last few months, The Vilna Shul's Havurah on the Hill has experienced several "aliyahs."

This past fall, after the HOH High Holidays "aliyahs" from Cambridge Street, HOH built two beautifully decorated sukkot on the Vilna's front porch. Among our attendees at the HOH Sukkot event was Dribaw, an IDF soldier and representative from Friends of the IDF, who shared with us about his family's incredible immigration "aliyah" by foot from Ethiopia to Israel.

In November, Alex Goldstein, former Press Secretary and spokesman for Governor Deval Patrick, was our guest speaker. He shared his experiences in the State House—also on the Hill—and on the campaign trail. He inspired us with his recounting of the moving and meaningful trip he made with the Governor on his trade mission "aliyah" to Israel last year.

HOH's December program was filled with humorous anecdotes by Israeli skeleton sled racer Bradley Chalupski, whose outstanding performances have done a great deal to put Israel on the map in the world of skeleton racing. Skeleton sleds don't make "aliyah"; they descend.

In January, Tufts University student Ariel Fagen shared her stories about training elephants in Nepal. The Nepali Himalayas and elephants are BIG "aliyahs."

February, Red Sox organist Josh Cantor shared stories about Fenway Park. For many, going to Fenway Park is a spiritual "aliyah."

In March, HOH's Purim party was a hit and HOH's Shabbat service featured Honorable Menschen, Boston's premiere post-collegiate a cappella group which combined Jewish, Israeli, and World music. The Vilna Shul walls sang!

HOH is looking forward to many exciting services and events this spring, including our Tenth Anniversary Celebration on Friday, May 18. You are invited to make a Beacon Hill "aliyah" to attend HOH Shabbat services and HOH's other events.

Support The Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture

With your support, The Vilna Shul provides a unique and historic site for the young families, unaffiliated Jews and visitors of all faiths from all over world to connect spiritually, culturally and historically with our Jewish traditions.

Make a gift today! Your gift will enable the Vilna Shul to continue to:

- Maintain and preserve our Boston landmark
- Welcome all to explore their Jewish identity
- Develop exciting new tours and exhibits Provide educational programs to K-12 students
- Host a variety of speakers, workshops, films and concerts which showcase Jewish culture and history

Contribute now! Honor our past, maintain our present and build our future.

Make a fully tax-deductible contribution to The Vilna Shul's Annual Fund.

DONATE ONLINE NOW at www.vilnashul.org