

On Your Doorposts Winter 01/02 And Beyond Your Gates

An Extended Jewish Family

Growing and Learning with a Family Havurah

by Patty Bloom

We numbered 16 the first time we met. Twelve adults. Two toddlers. Two newborns. Huddled under a sukkah we had collectively purchased, built and decorated, some of us held the lulav and etrog for the first time...some of us struggled to pronounce the prayers correctly...all of us wondered what role this group – this havurah – would play in our lives and the lives of our children. We pulled out our calendars, agreed to attend bimonthly events, and as a declaration of our commitment, marked our children’s heights on a support beam and vowed to do so each year.



A few months ago, we met for the fifth time under that sukkah. This time, we numbered 24. This time, we were surrounded by colorful decorations crafted by little hands. This time, we shook the lulav and etrog comfortably, and then helped our children do the same. The four oldest children were some two feet taller than they had been at our debut event, and the support

beam was now crammed with dozens of markings. Though the air was crisp, the atmosphere was warm – as it often is among old friends.

After all, we’ve shared a lot together. We’ve dipped apples in honey, waved Israeli flags and braided challah. We’ve counted stars for Havdalah outside of

Our fifth year under the sukkah...now we number 24!

cabins at Trout Lodge and Innsbrook. We’ve celebrated births, dedicated new homes, supported each other in times of grief. We’ve taught, and we’ve learned. And in the process, we’ve provided for our children a Judaism that is rich and meaningful and fun.

Coming Full Circle

But our havurah is by no means unique. The ancient roots of the havurah movement began to sprout in American Jewish life more than 30 years ago. And today, hundreds, perhaps thousands of havurot meet regularly so members can celebrate their existence as Jews.

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Interactions: Programs that Work

For more than 5,000 years, the Jewish family has perpetuated our traditions. And in recent years, area synagogues and temples have made Jewish family education a priority. Each issue of **Doorposts** features family education programs that have successfully promoted intergenerational interactions in the St. Louis Jewish community.

From the Ordinary to the Extraordinary — Things have changed around United Hebrew Congregation since famed author, speaker and tzedakah expert Danny Siegel came to visit. People are walking around with cell phones that don't work. Bottles, diapers and Desitin fill a baby crib in the hallway. And for the first time, pre-teens are on the roster of the Mitzvah Committee, as bar and bat mitzvah students team with their parents to spearhead congregation-wide drives for clothing, school supplies and videos.

"Sometimes it only takes a small act to make a difference," Siegel said to an audience of children, teens, parents and grandparents last spring. And then he asked them to volunteer to make phone calls or signs or announcements during services. The result: more than 1,000 cell phones have been reprogrammed and given to women at risk. Parents are working with their children on mitzvah projects, and at the same time role-modeling Jewish values. And for many families, tzedakah has become an ordinary part of daily living, not something extraordinary. Take your congregation on a mitzvah journey. For information, call Cheryl Whatley, (314) 434-3404.

Shabbat Seder — Some 200 guests of all ages sat around the Shabbat tables at Sha'arei Chesed Shul on November 16. They made kiddish, feasted on a gourmet meal and sang joyfully...though this was no ordinary Shabbat seder. After all, many of its participants were new to Shabbat and its rituals.

At the evening's end, parents carried away much more than tired children. They carried an understanding of each blessing, ritual and song. They carried a familiarity with the music of Shlomo

Carlebach — music that emanated from a guest cantor while multi-generations danced together in celebration. They carried information gleaned from a post-meal educational forum that offered relevant study for adults and stories for children. And they carried Shabbos energy — inspiration to create meaningful Shabbat experiences in their own homes. Invite your congregants to a Shabbat seder. For information, call Rabbi Elazar Grunberger, (314) 862-2474 or (314) 863-7485.

B'yachad — Fifty students sat contemplating Maimonides' eight degrees of tzedakah — a scene you might expect to find in any religious school classroom. But the students gathered at Temple Israel on September 23 were far from typical. About half were 12 years old. The other half, their parents. And after discussing how they might better fulfill their obligation of tzedakah in the coming year, they tossed bird seed into a nearby stream, an age-old tradition called Tashlich that symbolically casts off the burden of past sins.

The program was the first in a series that will bring parents and children of each grade together — B'yachad — for instruction. Plans call for Middle-East peace talks with fourth graders and their parents, a Tu B'shvat seder for first graders and their parents, and a prophets board game for fifth graders and their parents. And if those programs are anything like the sixth grade tzedakah lesson, parents will feel more involved in their child's religious school experience... and will learn something with their child at the same time. Bring parents and children together at your religious school. For information, call Debbie Morosohk, (314) 432-8077. ●

Volumes of Success Stories

The Jewish Family Education Program Bank

It's been 20 years since Jewish family education began in an effort to nourish Jewish identity and continuity. And among the cadre of intergenerational programs that have been produced since that time are hundreds of success stories. Stories of enhanced home celebrations... of meaningful connections with Israel...of families that have incorporated ritual or prayer or mitzvot into their lives.

Now these success stories fill volumes, thanks to a grant from the Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust, honoring the memory of Shirlee Green.

This fall, thousands of program materials, pedagogic articles and seminar notes were meticulously organized into a Jewish Family Education Program Bank, housed at Central Agency for Jewish Education, and available to family educators and lay leaders throughout the community.

So What's It to You? You want to offer your congregants, school families or havurah a meaningful, interactive Shabbat program. Or a mock trip to Israel. Or an outdoor lesson that teaches about respecting the earth. Why start from scratch? At the program bank, you'll find proven programs and information prepared by Jewish family educators from St. Louis and around the country — recipes, blessings, stories, crafts, worksheets, articles for parents, lists of relevant children's books, sample promotional brochures, activity ideas and more.

Programs are organized by the following topics: Torah, animals, Shabbat, God and prayer, tzedakah, mitzvot, Israel, Passover, High Holidays, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Purim, Tu B'Shvat, Hanukkah and family b'nai mitzvot.

The Family Education Program Bank is open 9 am-4 pm, Monday through Friday. ●



Where Will You Count the Stars on February 9?

Our sages taught that Shabbat ends when three stars can be counted in the evening sky. Even if the night is cloudy, the stars at the newly renovated Planetarium will shine brightly.

Havdalah Under the Stars • James S. McDonnell Planetarium

Saturday, February 9, 2002 • 7:30-10:30 pm

Havdalah Services at 7:45 pm, 8:45 pm and 9:45 pm

\$3 per person • maximum \$12 per family

Havdalah separates Shabbat from the work week, the holy from the mundane. Under thousands of twinkling stars and glowing planets, families will participate in a Havdalah service, sing the associated melodies and prayers, and enjoy many related activities. To reserve your space, call CAJE, (314) 442-3763, or your family educator.

Presented by the Jewish Family Educators' Network in cooperation with Central Agency for Jewish Education and funded by the Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust, honoring the memory of Shirlee Green

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Literally, havurah means fellowship, and its members often are united by a common life stage, denomination or congregation affiliation. When that common denominator is children, the result can be positive Jewish memories that parents and children will share for a lifetime. “So many of the fun programs for kids – camp, youth group, synagogue retreats – don’t include parents,” says Suzanne Robins. “But with our havurah, our entire family can be fun and playful and Jewish together.”

Making memories with children, however, was only a hypothetical concept when Robins and her husband joined a havurah 17 years ago through Congregation B’nai Amoona. At the time, their group consisted of seven newly married couples. Today, the adults are outnumbered by their children, and the events of the havurah have come full circle. “It used to be that the adults would organize and lead services for Shabbat or Havdalah,” says Robins. “Now our teenagers are in charge. They read Torah, Haftarah, the whole thing.”

In the process, the families have developed meaningful relationships with each other – the kind of relationships that prompt many temples and synagogues to promote havurot to their

memberships. “Small groups help people to feel a place of belonging in a large synagogue,” says Rabbi Lynn Liberman, associate rabbi at B’nai Amoona. Robins agrees. “We sit together in shul. Some of our teens are assistants in classes of our younger children. Within our synagogue, our havurah is an extended family.”

Lessons for the Family Classroom

Like most Jewish families, a havurah can effectively infuse its children with Jewish values and traditions. When members learn together, they teach by example that Jewish education is a life-long journey. When members pray together, they empower children to “do Jewish” even outside of the congregation. And

when members celebrate together, they turn homes, parks, even hiking trails into powerful Jewish classrooms.

As for our havurah, the lessons in our classrooms always seem

fresh and new because we see them

from our children’s

perspectives. And, of course, those perspectives are ever changing, ever growing...much like the heights on the support beam of our sukkah.

Want to create your own family havurah? Gather your friends, your calendars and your interest in growing Jewishly. Your temple or synagogue can provide assistance.



The support beam of our sukkah is now crammed with dozens of markings.