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Winter 2005

JEWISH SPIRIT

the magazine of TORCH - torah outreach resource center of houston

Special Chanukah Issue

Being Jewish in America

A Look at Campus,
Sports and
Entertainment

A New Celebration:
Jewish Unity Live

8 Gifts of Value
to **Give Your**
Children

The Hiddur Mitzvah
Project: Art that
Makes a Difference

Welcome Page 2

TORCH Events Calendar Page 7

TORCH in the spotlight Page 59

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The Houston Jewish Community experienced a very emotional High Holiday season. As we were preoccupied with the work of assisting our brothers and friends from Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina, we then faced our own potentially lethal storm. God looked favorably upon us and we were sealed with blessing for the New Year.

TORCH just celebrated its annual dinner on November 21, after a postponement due to the two hurricanes. We were honored to bestow our Houston Jewish Spirit award to Bobbi and Tom Asarch, who have been touched by TORCH over the past several years, by their attendance at classes and their personal relationships with the TORCH faculty. Laura Loebl and Elyse Kalmans, who received the Young Leadership Award, have been active on our Board and have been a great support to TORCH.

The New Year has also brought many changes to our TORCH families. Our Executive Director for the past five years, Rabbi Yakov Polatsek, has decided to move his energetic style of leadership into the private sector. Rabbi Polatsek and his wife Frumie have been an incredibly high-powered, dynamic, and productive force for TORCH and the entire Houston Jewish Community throughout their tenure here. It has been a pleasure and an honor to work with Rabbi Polatsek during my time as President. We thank them for their years of service and wish them great success in their new endeavors. While he is stepping down from his responsibilities as Executive Director, Rabbi Polatsek will continue his affiliation with TORCH in a consultative capacity.

Rabbi Polatsek has recommended that Rabbi Aryeh Wolbe replace him in his position. Rabbi Wolbe joined TORCH this past September in the position of Associate Director and has been working closely with Rabbi Polatsek and the Dean of TORCH, Rabbi Yossi Grossman, to ensure a smooth transition of leadership.

Rabbi Aryeh Wolbe has dedicated many years to outreach in the Former Soviet Union, Israel and in the United States. After studying in Jerusalem for many years and receiving rabbinic ordination there, Rabbi Wolbe and his wife, Zehava, have chosen to focus their energy specifically on the Jewish communities in the US. They share a genuine love for every Jew, accepting everyone for who they are, while never hesitating to befriend new people. Aryeh, known for his charisma and Zehava for her charm, together, love to learn, teach and laugh! Together with their two children, Dovi and Meira, they are proud to be Houstonians and part of the TORCH family.

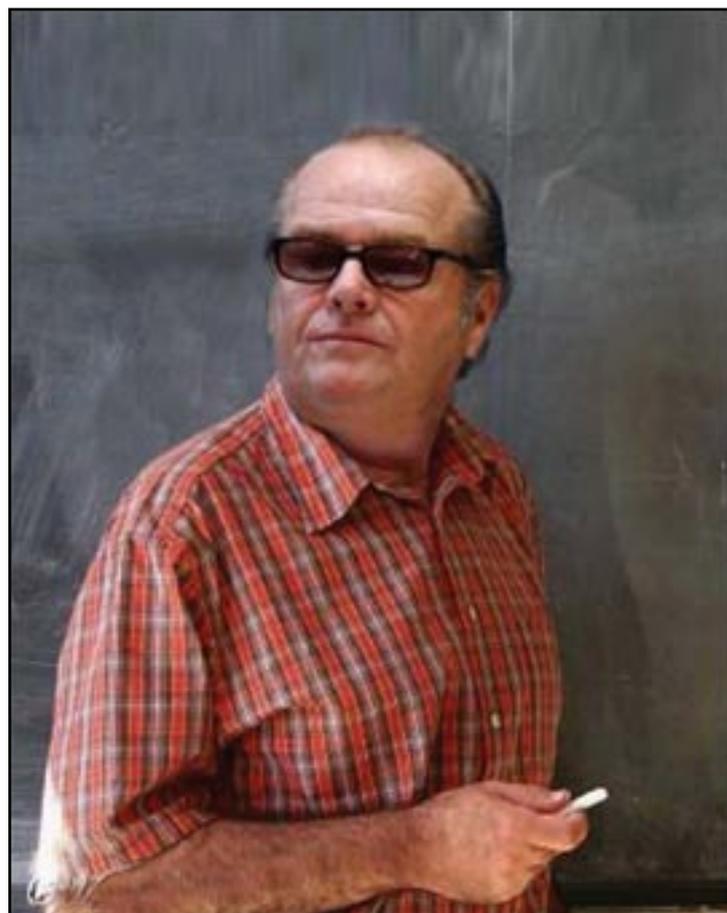
The Mission of TORCH continues to be “Connecting Jews with Judaism.” Toward that goal, we provide opportunities for one-on-one learning, formal and informal classes, and Continuing Education seminars for physicians and attorneys. Our annual Women’s Conference has received nationwide acclaim for its innovative approach to providing Jewish women with opportunities to network and participate in an intensive day of study. We encourage you to join us in our mission.

If you would like more information about our classes or events, or to receive our weekly email, please log on to our website at www.torchweb.com or by email to torch@torchweb.com. Please call the TORCH office at 713-721-6400 to set up a learning group or class, or to get connected to an existing one.

Dr. Myron Friedman,
President of the TORCH Board of Directors

Mix and Mingle with Young Jewish Professionals in their 20's and 30's
THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2006
Location to be announced.

Shmooze or Lose!



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- * Why the Jews?
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- * Mystical Secrets of the Mikvah - A Jewish Approach to Sensuality
- * Tikkun Olam & Environmental Issues

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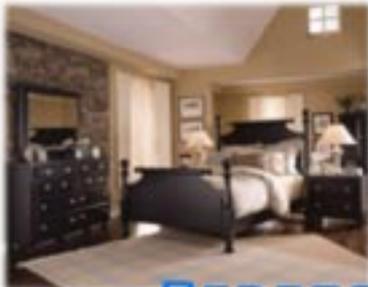
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THE WOMEN'S DIVISION OF TORCH
Connecting Jews & Judaism

TORCH NEWS

6



Some of the graduates of the Hebrew reading class, from left to right: Jerry Waldman, Marilyn Waldman, Gabe Blog, Alice Gruner, Lawrence Levy, Jennifer Rosenzweig, and Jennifer Rosenzweig. Shalva Weinreb and the teacher, Rabbi Sruli Weinreb are on the far right.



Business Ethics Lunch and Learn at Flagship in Greenway Plaza. Left to Right: Andrea Moore, Rabbi Yossi Grossman, Dean of TORCH, David Mincborg, Wayne Krouse, Fred Sklar, Mark Kaufman, and Gary Rachlin.



Mincha Minyan (afternoon service) at the National playoffs? Rabbi Grossman arranged a Minyan for two fans who are saying Kaddish for their parents on the upper deck at Minute Maid Park.



Bob Kobr presenting the "Nuts & Bolts" at the TORCH annual Home Depot Sukkab-Building workshop with facilitator Rabbi Ken Brodtkin.

EVENTS CALENDAR

For more info, or to rsvp for any of these classes or to start a new group or class, contact us at 713-721-6400, email us at torch@torchweb.com, or log on the web to www.torchweb.com

SPECIAL EVENTS

Don't Know Jack About Judaism? This 8-week series will provide an introduction to various Jewish philosophies and rituals. Starting Wednesday, Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14, 21, Jan. 4, 11, 18, 25, 7:30PM @ the JCC.

Third Annual Houston Conference for Jewish Women – Sun, Dec. 4, 9:45AM - 2:45PM @ the InterContinental Houston Hotel.

Discovery Seminar – The Discovery Seminar is a 2-hour multi-media investigation into the logical and spiritual basis of Jewish belief, Thursday February 9th, 7:00PM. Location to be announced.

City Shmooze – Mix & mingle with other young Jewish professionals. 7:00PM open sushi bar, 8:00 PM Pamensky Live, a hilarious program highlighting what make men and women tick in a relationship. Location to be announced

Inspired Design – Design your home for Jewish family living. Three Mondays with an interior designer and an ASCENT lecturer discussing the kitchen, living room and bedroom from an aesthetic and spiritual perspective. January 30, February 6, February 13, 7:30PM. Location to be announced.

ONGOING

Sunday

Bellaire Havura – 6:00PM, Informal discussions on various topics of Jewish life for young couples. Rabbi Ken Brodtkin.

Sugar Land Havura – 7:00PM, Various TORCH Rabbis and their wives lead heated discussions on Torah topics of contemporary interest.

Meyerland Havura – 4:00PM, Young couples debate, argue and dialogue. Anything goes!!! Rabbi Yossi & Faige Grossman.

Monday

Daily Daf Yomi – 6:50 AM @ Young Israel. Learn a folio of Talmud daily and join thousands the world over in finishing the ENTIRE Talmud. Led by Rabbi Yaakov Nagel.

Business Ethics Lunch & Learn – 12:00PM @ Greenway One Suite 750.

Rabbi Yossi Grossman leads a discussion on moral and ethical imperatives in business.

Mussar Lunch & Learn – 12:15PM @ Shefa Bakery, 4530 Beechnut.

Taught by Rabbi Sruli Weinreb, such topics as happiness, anger management, jealousy, developing self esteem etc.

Keeping FIT (Females In Torah) – 8:15PM, @ Seven Acres. Chavruta style learning: Small group or partner learning. Participants select the topic of their choice and interest and are paired with a facilitator to study.

West University Havura – 7:30PM. A discussion group dealing with the how and why of Jewish rituals.

Tuesday

Contemporary Jewish Thoughts (for Women by Women) – 11:45AM.

Each class is a dialogue on a different Jewish idea, value, or *mitzvah*. Led by Faige Grossman in private homes.

continued on page 63



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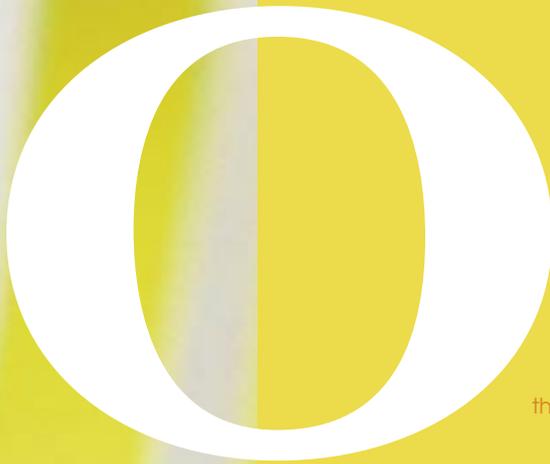
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YOUR INNER FLAME

The flames of the menorah
are small and silent.

58



On the first night of Chanukah we light one candle. Small and silent. We walk into the room and we barely notice its presence. Like our souls, the flame is there. But very subtle.

As we hurtle through days filled with noise and confusion, it's easy to lose track of our souls. There are family obligations, kids, school, the office, dating, vacations, the six o'clock news, the fortunes of our favorite teams, making dinner, reading E-mail, getting the car fixed, returning overdue books, returning calls, paying bills, and surfing the Web.

And somehow... amidst all of this we're supposed to remember that each of us has a soul. That deep down our inner essence wants to do more than run errands. That we yearn to touch the infinite, luminous, divine, transcendent dimension...

The lighting of the menorah creates a new space in our lives. A space where we can, for awhile, divest ourselves of everything else that tugs at us and focus on the "deep down" of life. Who we truly are deep down. What about our inner self we deem to be precious. What we want to do with this brief time we call life, what we want to stand for, and who we want to be - deep down.

Each night of Chanukah, ponder "deep-down" issues. Ask yourself a question, and then sit quietly

in front of the silent glow of your menorah, listening for the soft sound of your own inner flame. It may take a few minutes or even longer, but be patient and the answer will come.

When it does, write down your answer. After the first night you will have one answer. The second night you'll have two. And by the last night of Chanukah, both the menorah in your home - and the flame deep within your soul - will be glowing more brightly.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- 1) "Deep down, what I truly want is..."
- 2) "I feel most in touch with my soul when..."
- 3) "What can I do tomorrow that will in some way express the deepest part of who I am?"
- 4) "If I could give myself one piece of advice for keeping in touch with my deepest aspirations, what would I say?"
- 5) "If I could give my spouse, child or best friend one tip for not losing sight of the most important things in life, what would I say?"

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Spotlight on TORCH

59

TORCH (Torah Outreach Resource Center of Houston) connects hundreds of Houston Jews on a weekly basis to Judaism. Our mission is to connect Jews and Judaism by establishing and sustaining a cadre of scholars and staff that will create and implement meaningful learning opportunities for every Jewish adult in the Houston area regardless of background, and by enabling them to experience the joy and vibrancy of Judaism.

TORCH is an independent, local, not-for-profit organization which is funded mostly through private donations from Houstonians who value our work and want to become partners in our mission. The balance of TORCH's budget comes from program revenues and individual contributions from outside Houston.

Transcending the confines of a typical classroom, TORCH offers a fresh approach to learning about Torah and Judaism. Whether or not you have been involved with Jewish education, TORCH is a great place to explore your heritage.

TORCH offers 35 different classes on various topics, such as lunch and learns, *chavruta* (one-on one) learning and much more. TORCH's "campus without walls" makes classes accessible throughout the greater Houston area almost every day of the year. We will join you in your home or at your office to share with you the joy of Judaism. As Houston Jewry grows, so do we. TORCH offers learning opportunities for Jews young and old and from every level of religious observance. Below are a couple of examples of classes offered:

Breakneck Through the Bible will take you on a rollercoaster ride through the whole Torah, starting with Genesis, ending with Deuteronomy and covering everything in between. In this thirty-two week course you will be given the tools and knowledge that will enable you to glean the essential philosophical and ethical elements of Judaism. This class meets at United Orthodox Synagogue on Thursday evenings.

Partners in Torah offers individualized study opportunities to help people discover more about their Judaism. Study partners are available to learn in the traditional *chavruta*, or one-on-one, style. Some of the subjects which can be explored include Jewish history, law, philosophy, prayer, Bible or Talmud, in Hebrew or in English. Flexibility is the hallmark of this program. Study partners can learn either in one of the group learning sites (every other Monday night at 8:15 PM in Seven Acres for women, every Tuesday night at 8:30 PM at the Young Israel of Houston for men) or they can set up a time and place that is mutually convenient. For those who have erratic schedules or who are always on the road, national Partners in Torah will arrange for a telephone *chavruta*, which provides maximum flexibility; since there is no need to arrange a place to meet; all that is needed is a phone and a mutually convenient time.

TORCH also holds two major conferences during the year. The Women's Conference, held in the fall, is sponsored by ASCENT (Arlene Waldman Stock Center for Torah), the Women's Division of TORCH, and Jewish women's organizations in the Greater Houston area. ASCENT was established in loving memory of Arlene Waldman Stock and the mission is to unite the women of

continued on page 63




**Houston's Jewish Event
of the Year!**

SAVE THE DATE!

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9TH
7 PM - 9 PM / Location TBA**
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the Jewish Community of Greater Houston through classes and programs, and the annual Conference for Jewish Women.

The annual Women's Conference gathers Jewish women from all streams of Judaism and connects them through the powerful intellectual vehicles of study, dialogue, and reflection. The purpose of the conference is to give the Jewish women in the Greater Houston Area an opportunity to focus on their Jewish identity and Jewish femininity from an all women's perspective. This will be achieved by being part of a greater group and addressing the aspects that make Jewish women similar and understanding those that make each one unique.

The other conference is on Jewish Medical Ethics and takes place in the spring. The conference examines the challenges that contemporary medicine poses, through the lens of Jewish values. It is organized by TORCH and the Maimonides Society of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and is convened at a time when daily news headlines herald breakthroughs in medical technologies along with the thorny ethical and moral dilemmas that surround them. Physicians, psychologists, nurses, social workers, rabbis and lay people are the targeted audience. Continuing education credit is awarded to both physician and lawyers.

For more information, to find a suitable class or program, or to start one of your own, please contact the TORCH office at 713-721-6400, torch@torchweb.com or visit our webpage at www.torchweb.com.

American Cases & Talmudic Law – 11:45AM @ Vinson & Elkins. A comparison of the ancient Talmudic and modern legal systems. CLE accredited for attorneys. Rabbi Yossi Grossman. (Monthly)

Partners in Torah – 8:30PM @ Young Israel, Personalized one-on-one learning opportunities, topic of choice.

Wednesday

Club MEDicine – 7:00AM @ Greenpark One, 7515 Main, Ground floor Board Room.

Join members of the Jewish Medical Community and Rabbi Yossi Grossman for a light breakfast and heavy discussion of contemporary issues in Jewish medical ethics.

Women's Lunch & Learn – 12:15PM in Memorial area, Faige Grossman

Latte & Learn – 8:00PM @ the JCC. Join other young Jewish professionals to schmooze and learn more about our Jewish heritage. Rabbi Sruli Weinreb

Talmud 101 – 9:30PM, private homes. A basic introduction to the skills necessary to learn Talmud. Text based. Rabbi Yossi Grossman.

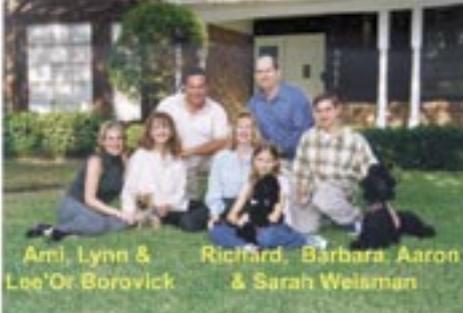
Thursday

NASA Lunch & Learn – 11:45 @ Gil Ruth Bldg. Jewish scientists meet bi-weekly at NASA. Rabbi Sruli Weinreb leads a thorough mind-blowing analysis of various texts.

Breakneck Through the Bible – 8:00PM @ UOS. Buckle up and satisfy your need for speed as Rabbi Danny Masri takes you on a rollercoaster ride through the entire Torah, starting with Genesis and ending with Deuteronomy.

The Heights Havura – 7:30PM, in private homes. A lively discussion based on *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers). R' Sruli & Shalva Weinreb

Sephardic Havura – 8:00PM @ private homes in the Galleria area. Rabbi Danny Masri

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