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Spring 2007

# JEWISH SPIRIT

The Magazine of TORCH (Torah Outreach Resource Center of Houston)

## A New Spirit of Jewish Leadership

Community Members

Who Make a Difference, *page 58*

A group of children gather at a local Houston synagogue to celebrate Tu B'Shvat



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a letter from

# rabbi aryeh wolbe

executive director

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TORCH makes Judaism  
alive. TORCH brings  
Judaism to the people.

Dear Friends,

I am frequently asked by people I meet ... what is TORCH? Is TORCH only in Houston or is it national? Where is TORCH located? Etc.

I would like to take a moment to answer some of these questions.

I would like to define TORCH in one sentence. Ok, maybe one paragraph.

TORCH is focused on connecting Jews to their heritage through high quality programming and a dynamic experience with Torah study. TORCH makes Judaism alive. TORCH brings Judaism to the people.

TORCH's mission is simply connecting Jews and Judaism.. We have no membership. We have no dues. We're there for anyone who wants to study.

With the closing of the 2006 Calendar year, the time has come to reflect, critique, and perhaps kvell over the year that passed - a year in which we experienced significant growth.

The TORCH faculty devotes every minute of their day to advancing Jewish knowledge, awareness and pride through the study of Torah.

Our Rabbis dedicate their time to communicate the cherished words that have kept our nation strong for generations. Those same "ancient" words are strengthening the lives of modern day Jews and empowering them to address the challenges of our turbulent generation.

We've done numerous exciting events this year: the City Shmooze, Discovery Seminar, Jewish Medical Ethics Conference, Purim Party, Pesach Primer, Summer Soiree Lecture Series, Da Vinci Code, Eden Fest Concert, High Holiday Primer, Rosh Hashanah Retreat, Read Hebrew Programs, ASCENT Women's Conference, Journey through Jewish Fundamentals Lecture Series, Breakneck through the Bible, and Chanukah & Tu B'shvat Primer. This is in addition to our ongoing classes such as the Daf Yomi, the Daily Dose conference call, Jewish Medical Ethics at the Medical Center and loads of other classes and Lunch and Learns. I think we are on track to reach our goal of educating, and inspiring members of the Houston Jewish community to connect with their heritage.

The Talmud teaches us that "Mitzvah ha ba l'iyadcha, al tachmitzena" - A mitzvah that comes to your hand, don't let it go sour. Torah study is a mitzvah; it's here, and there's nothing that makes a TORCH Rabbi happier than a phone call from someone asking to learn.

# 3

In November, 2006 TORCH hired three full time rabbinic interns to be available to study with members of the community on a regular basis at a more advanced level. This marked the beginning of a new phase of unprecedented growth for our Houston community. On day one, over 36 weekly one-hour learning slots were reserved, the response was incredible. I approached a respected member of our community who is learning regularly with one of the rabbis and asked how it was going. He said, "terrible!", I was obviously caught off guard and asked him to explain, which he did. "I only have the rabbi twice a week ...I want more!"

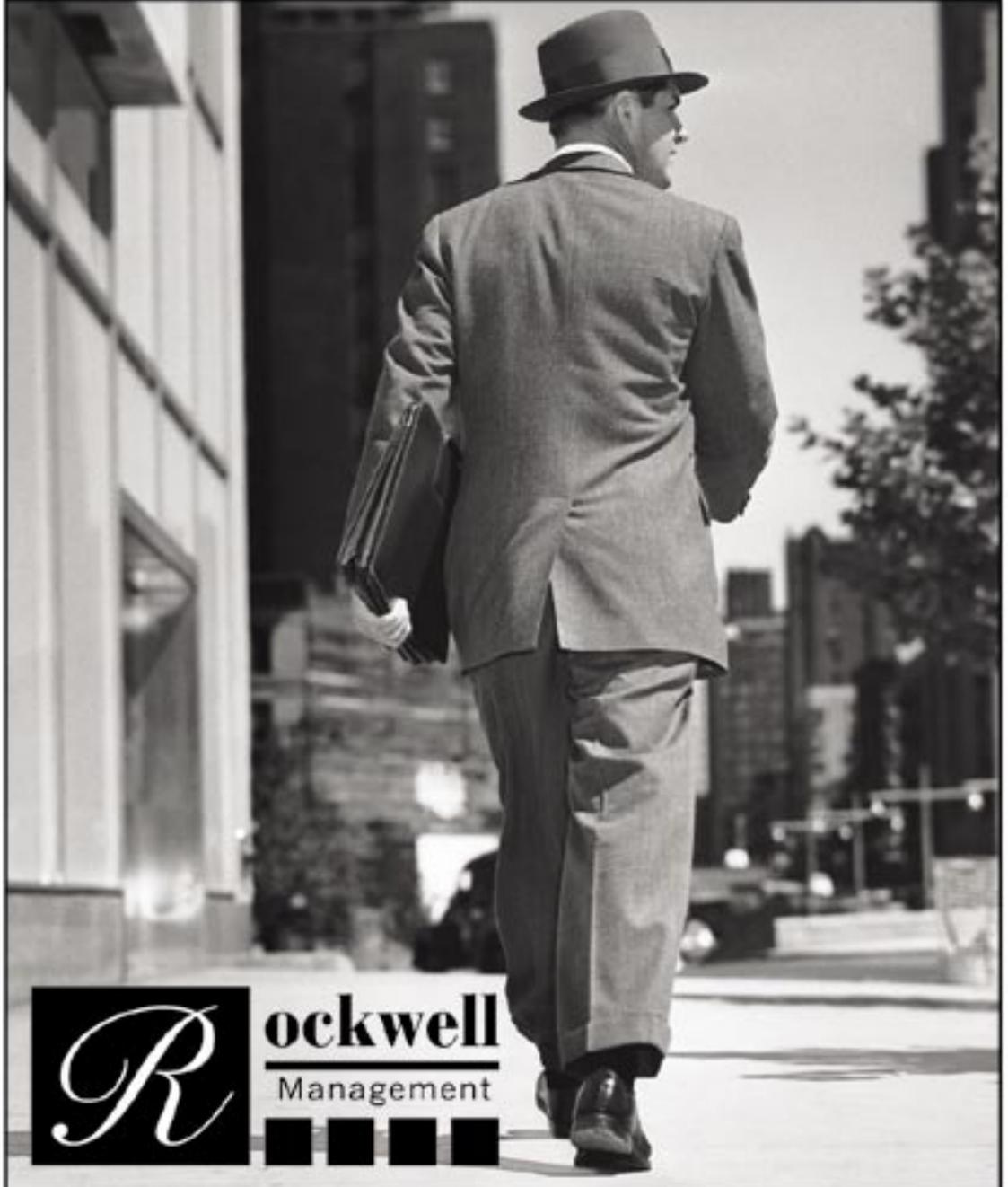
We hope that G-d will grant us the opportunity to continue to grow, to bring in even more Rabbis, so that each and every one of us can grow together.

With the coming of Pesach, the holiday of redemption, we should pause to reflect on those things that hamper our abilities to grow. Pesach is a time to break loose of those barriers. We can do it. May we all grow together and achieve our personal redemption - L'shana haba'ah b'yerushalayim. Amen.

Wishing you and your family a beautiful Pesach,

*Rabbi Aryeh Wolbe  
February 2007*

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# daily programs

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## Daily (Sunday through Friday)

**Daf Yomi** – 7:00 AM Daily, 8:45 AM on Sunday, with Rabbi Yaakov Nagel

*Learn a folio of Talmud daily and join thousands around the world who are working to finish the entire Talmud – one page at a time.*

**Beis Medrash Learning** – 8:00 PM – 10:00 PM with The Kollel

*Ever want to learn with a Rabbi all by yourself? Here's your chance!! Dozens of people come to the Beis Medrash nightly to study topics of their choice with their Rabbi. You can too!*

**Daily Dose of Torah** – 9:30 PM with Rabbi Aryeh Wolbe

*Based on the Artscroll series, "Daily Dose" is for anyone busy who can never find enough time to learn. Call from any phone and conference in to this 18 minute class. You'll be surprised how much you can learn in a short time.*

## Also, every week...

### MONDAY

**Walk & Learn** – 12:00 PM with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb

*Exercise your brain while you exercise your body. Take a brisk walk along the bayou while learning about the Parsha.*

**Lunch & Learn** - 12:50 PM with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb

*Can you do two things at one time? How about nourish your soul and body ... at the same time! Give it a try. (Saba's Pizza)*

**Lunch & Learn** – 12:00 PM with Rabbi Aryeh Wolbe

*A monthly discussion group on Torah, Mitzvot and being Jewish. (24 Greenway Plaza)*

**Business Ethics Lunch** – 12:00 PM with Rabbi Danny Masri

*A bi-weekly discussion group on moral and ethical imperatives in business. (Greenway One)*

**T.A.L.K. (TORCH's Advanced Learning Kollel)** - 7:15 PM with TORCH/ASCENT Faculty

*Looking for a structured approach to furthering Jewish learning through organized classes that empower you with a greater*

*knowledge and awareness of your heritage? Traditionally, advanced Jewish learning has been confined to the walls of the yeshiva and seminary, T.A.L.K. bridges these worlds to make real learning a reality for every willing Jew.*

**Women In Torah** – 8:15 PM with ASCENT Faculty

*Getting in touch with over 3,000 years of Jewish History, literature and tradition isn't that easy to do on your own. A learning partner would help! Join our "For Women Only" weekly study night for just one hour. It's FREE!*

### TUESDAY

**Crash Course in Basic Judaism** – 12:30 PM with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb

*A business networking group meeting bi-weekly to discuss basic Jewish concepts and the pleasures of being Jewish.*

**Executive Study Group** - 4:30 PM with Rabbi Aryeh Wolbe

*A Weekly study group for Executives on Torah, Mitzvot and being Jewish. (1100 Louisiana)*

**Journey through Jewish Fundamentals** – 8:00 PM with Rabbi Danny Masri

*A six-month comprehensive course of Jewish studies which covers the fundamentals of Jewish tradition, philosophy and history. Each month a different topic will be presented in an engaging and exciting way. Join the journey and see how the timeless wisdom of Judaism can add a more wholesome and meaningful future for you and your family. Complimentary coffee served. (Borders in Meyerland)*

**Mussar (Ethics)** – 8:00 PM With Rabbis Doniel Newman & Aryeh Wolbe

*Exploring methods of perfecting our character from the writings of our sages*

### WEDNESDAY

**Famous Jewish Responsa** – 12:30 PM with Rabbi Yossi Grossman

*Dig in to the reasons behind various minhagim (Jewish customs) and learn their sources while digging into your Kosher lunch. (Medical Center)*

# new staff joins torch 7

**Talmud 101** – 7:00PM with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb  
Want to “learn how to learn” Talmud? This is it! One hour a week.

**Sip of Life** – 8:00 PM with TORCH Faculty  
Getting in touch with over 3,000 years of Jewish history, literature and tradition isn’t that easy to do on your own. A learning partner or group would help! Join our weekly study night for just one hour. It’s FREE!

## THURSDAY

**Chassidus** – 8:00 AM with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb  
Get a glimpse into the ancient Chassidic traditions and practices.

**Breakneck through the Bible** – 12:30 PM with Rabbi Danny Masri  
Buckle up and satisfy your need for speed as you rollercoaster through the whole Torah, starting with Genesis and ending with Deuteronomy. (Madras Pavilion)

**Galleria Havurah (for Couples)** - 8:00 PM with Rabbi Danny Masri  
Informal discussions on various topics of Jewish life for young couples. (in private homes)

## FRIDAY

**Sephardic Prayer** – 7:45 AM with Rabbi Danny Masri  
Ever wish to experience tefilla (prayer) with a Sephardic twist? Try it at Beren Academy with Rabbi Masri.

## SHABBOS

**Parables and Fables** – 8:15 AM with Rabbi Danny Masri  
Study the hidden messages of the Midrash in each Torah portion.

**Lighting up the Week** – After Havdalah with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb  
Learn Contemporary Jewish Thought to give a spiritual start to your week.

**For more information or to reserve a spot please call 713-721-6400**



*Rabbi Doniel Newman, joined as an Avreich in November, 2006. Pictured here with his wife Sarah Sasha and children Nossan & Avrohom.*



*Rabbi Zev Fried joined as an Avreich in November, 2006. Pictured here with his wife Esther and children Eliezer and Yechezkel*



*Brook Kirsten joined the TORCH family as Program Director in January, 2007. Pictured here with her husband David & daughter Orli*



*Samantha Steinberg joined TORCH in December 2006, as Development Director. Pictured her with her husband Yitz & children Jacob and Talia*



*Rabbi Akiva Sutofsky, joined as an Avreich in November, 2006. Pictured here with his wife Chana and children Rivka, Chaya, Shira and Yehuda*

# the next generation of jewish leaders

*community members who make a difference.*

**T**ORCH, like all Jewish organizations, depends on the community to support it. More than monetary contributions, direct involvement is the key to success. The community leaders who take an active role in meeting and realizing TORCH's mission of connecting Jews with Judaism deserve special recognition.

## **ZEV MUNK: "FIND A FEW MINUTES AT A TIME"**

"It's not about the reward, it's about getting involved," says Dr. Zev Munk, a physician who has been in private practice for many years. Dr. Munk, who runs a contract pharmaceutical research company, helped found TORCH eight years ago in an effort to make Houston a center of Torah learning.



*Zev Munk visits his son, Ari, in Israel*

Along with the rest of the founders, he felt a "definite void in the community" and decided to take action. "TORCH was established to educate Houston's Jewish community members about their heritage and religious foundation and to try to bring people closer to Judaism".

"I feel that's being accomplished," says Dr. Munk, citing the dynamic young rabbis the group has recruited. "They're role models for the entire population". He points out that many of Houston's Jews have become more observant – not only within the Orthodox community, but in all denominations of Judaism. "I get tremendous nachas (joy) from this," he explains.

Helping to start TORCH, says Dr. Munk, is "one of my most important accomplishments." But it's not, by far, the only thing he has done: He's an active member and past president of the Young Israel of Houston and had been involved with other synagogues and Jewish schools in the Houston area. Currently, he serves on TORCH's board, and he is part of a small but dedicated team working to open a new girls' Jewish high school in Houston in 2008.

Leadership roles come naturally to Dr. Munk. He was active in his community in Montreal and volunteered extensively to raise awareness about Soviet Jewry in college. He worked as a solo practitioner and started his own company about thirteen years ago which has grown into a global venture that carries out pharmaceutical research programs in many therapeutic areas.

It's not easy to find time for all the work he does, but Dr. Munk says it's vital to make the time. Between his company, his parents and in-laws in Montreal, and his four children and grandchildren in

Brooklyn, New York, Lakewood, NJ and Jerusalem, Israel, he spends a great deal of his time traveling for clients and family. "I find a few minutes at a time" to devote to the causes he cares about.

"My wife, Susan, has always been active in various causes and chesed (kindness)." Her work, says Dr. Munk, influenced their children, which is a source of great pride to him. "My greatest reward is seeing that they have started getting involved in their own communities," he says. "They're all observant, all involved in Jewish causes, and my grandchildren are in great yeshivas and schools."

Dr. Munk urges anyone looking for a stronger sense of self to "just get involved" with TORCH. "Every little bit that anyone does magnifies itself. You may never see – or recognize – the reward, but to echo our Sages, a single good deed could create an entire new world," he says.



*Audrey Fersten*

### **AUDREY FERSTEN: "MAKE A REAL IMPACT"**

When Audrey Fersten and her husband, Bradley Sabloff, moved to Houston from Montreal in 1999, they realized how different the two communities were. Audrey describes Montreal as a very close knit community where everybody knows one another. She felt the difference immediately as Houston is naturally a more sprawling community and delineates itself differently than what they had known growing up.

Audrey was first introduced to TORCH when a friend invited her to attend one of Faige Grossman's classes. "I got so much out of it personally that I knew I needed to expose my husband to this organization." She began bringing her husband along to TORCH events, and almost immediately, the couple felt something. They were both very receptive to the classes and were excited to continue their personal growth.

"We were extremely welcome in everyone's homes. We felt these people were our peers – no one ever looked down on us."

Soon after getting involved in TORCH, Audrey – a Partner at Bridgeway Capital Management – and her husband – a radiologist at MD Anderson Cancer Center, joined a shul, and they currently both serve on TORCH's board. More importantly, she says, "Being involved has created a community for us, one that really matters. It's more important than ordinary work – this is something we want to see flourish. We've become involved with people across all denominations. TORCH really brings together Jews from all walks of life, to learn more about their heritage, and enables them to grow in their Judaism."

Fersten says her contributions to TORCH are almost on a consulting basis. "I bring a fresh eye and offer a different perspective," she says. She has organized groups that meet at her home. She

teaches courses – women in finance and fiscal responsibility for young women – and has served as a lecturer at the ASCENT conference. In addition to teaching, Audrey also chaired an ASCENT conference and has put together the marketing pieces that help TORCH secure vital funding.

In fact, much of Audrey's work for TORCH is related to fundraising. "I have a skill – a lack of inhibition, really," she says. "It makes fundraising a natural fit, so I'm often put in that role. The need is there; it's very great. I help make sure we meet that need."

Audrey is deeply touched by how much her work is appreciated. "I'm not just one of a bunch of people on a board. I'm heard. I really make an impact," she says. But her greatest reward comes from seeing TORCH grow and add more programming. She's also delighted when she considers her own personal development – and the way she and her husband can interact on a Jewish personal level.



*Hadassah Women at the Women's Conference*



*Women's Conference Mock Shabbat Table (Led by Malka Moskovitz, Frumie Polatsek, and Zahava Wolbe)*



*Fraydee Wender and Susan Munk learn Cake Decorating at the Womens Conference*



*Aaron Brown and Scott Asarch studying Torah at Sip of Life with Rabbi Sruli Weinreb*



*T.A.L.K. Participants engrossed in a Torah class*



*New Partners in Torah Marisa Brown and Sarah Sasha Newman*

# Jewish Medical Ethics

TORCH  
presents

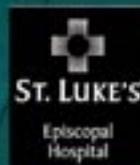
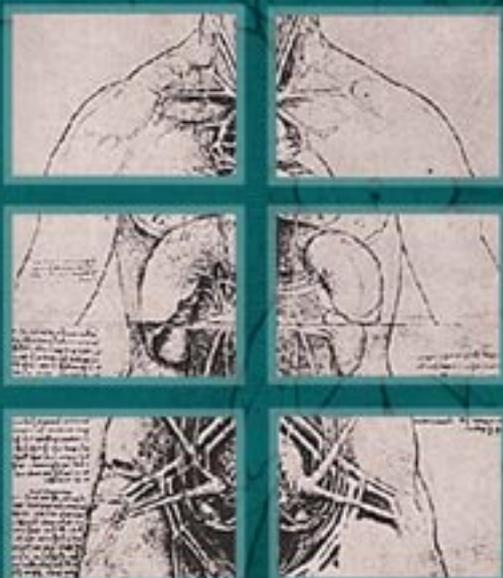
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