

*The Jewish
Outreach Institute's
Guide for Making
the Holidays
More Inclusive*

JEWISH HOLIDAYS

*Honoring
Adam R. Bronfman*

JOI'S GUIDE TO JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Honoring Adam R. Bronfman



1270 Broadway, Suite 609, New York, NY 10001
212.760.1440 Phone
212.760.1569 Fax
www.JOI.org | info@JOI.org

Compiled and Edited by
Levi Fishman, JOI Communications Associate

Design by
Masters Group Design, Inc.

*We are proud to honor
Adam R. Bronfman
for his unwavering commitment
to outreach and unity
among the Jewish people.*

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THE JEWISH HOLIDAY CYCLE CAN BE A CONFUSING TIME for anyone not accustomed to all the traditions. One week during the year we build a hut to sleep in outdoors; another week we don't eat bread. These customs can be especially hard to navigate for the family members of other religious backgrounds within the context of an interfaith relationship.



That is why we have put together this holiday guide. The purpose is to de-mystify the holidays and show how they can be celebrated by anyone with a connection to Judaism. As we celebrate Adam R. Bronfman and his dedication to outreach and unity among the Jewish people, we have similarly designed this holiday guide to promote unity among all those who would cast their lot with the Jewish people, especially intermarried families raising Jewish children.



Everyone at JOI, past and present, is responsible for the content found within this holiday guide. You could say this guide was written over the past 20 years. The text comes from blog entries on our website to articles we have published; from messages to our various listserves to books written on behalf of JOI. But whatever the physical source we pulled the material, it all came from the same emotional place: the desire of all of us to help make the holidays more inclusive, welcoming, and meaningful for interfaith families.



2008 TRIBUTE EVENING

Honoring Adam R. Bronfman

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ROSH HASHANAH

ESSENTIALS

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, literally translated as “The Head of the Year.” The holiday celebrates the creation of the world. Rosh Hashanah is a two-day holiday in most American congregations, but in some Reform congregations it is celebrated for one day. It began as a one-day holiday, but became a two-day holiday in the Diaspora to compensate for uncertainty about the date—this found its way into Israel as well. The mood is both joyful and solemn, and the holiday is split between home and the synagogue.

Traditional Rosh Hashanah foods express the hope for a sweet, prosperous new year. The eating of apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year is the most popular tradition. Other traditional foods include honey cake or another sweet dessert. Challah bread is also traditional, with some families baking it in a round shape to symbolize the complete cycle of the seasons.



(From the curriculum of “The Mothers Circle,” a program of the Jewish Outreach Institute for women of other religious backgrounds who are raising Jewish children within the context of intermarriage)

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OPEN THE TENT

There are many creative ways to celebrate the High Holidays...

Host a honey tasting. It is traditional to wish others a “sweet New Year” or “*shana tova u’metuka*” in Hebrew on Rosh Hashanah. Sweeten your family’s holiday with a honey tasting. Monofloral honeys are flavored with the nectar of a variety of plant species including Acacia, Buckwheat and Clover and possess unique flavors and colors. They can be found at specialty grocery stores and are sure to liven up the holiday dinner table.

Throw a Rosh Hashanah party! What better way to celebrate as a family than to throw a party? The whole family can get involved making food (apples, honey and challah) and decorations (cards). Practice Rosh Hashanah greetings, such as “*Shana Tova*” (Happy New Year). This is a great opportunity to invite relatives, both Jewish and other, to celebrate and learn together.



(From the article “Ten Tips for Celebrating the High Holidays with your Family,” by JOI executive director Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and program officer Liz Marcovitz,)

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REFLECTIONS

The High Holidays are about telling the truth. Thus, it is time to start speaking the truth about our behaviors and making plans to change. No more jokes about “the goyim” (non-Jews). No more comments like, “funny, he doesn’t look Jewish,” or worse, “she’s got *shiksappeal*” (a *shiksa* is [a derogatory term for] a non-Jewish woman). No more sermons about “intermarriage finishing Hitler’s job for him.” And let’s stay away from the sprinkling of Yiddishisms as if they were some secret codes to make us feel superior and these new members of our families inferior as a result. If our goal is to include rather than to exclude, then this is the season to begin our work.

Don’t wait another year; begin the process of *cheshbon hanafesh* (an accounting of the soul) now. Reach out to the interfaith members of your family. Invite them to join you for the holidays. As befits the holiday season, ask them for their forgiveness for calling them “other”—even as you forgive yourself for doing so.



(From the article “One for your High Holidays checklist: Welcoming the Stranger” by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, which appeared on the website www.Interfaithfamily.com, 2001)

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YOM KIPPUR

ESSENTIALS

Yom Kippur literally means “Day of Atonement.” It marks the end of a ten-day penitential period that begins with Rosh Hashanah and is the holiest day of the Jewish year. Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the most significant Jewish theologians of the twentieth century, called Yom Kippur “Judaism’s great cathedral.” Not a physical cathedral of stones and stained-glass windows, but a cathedral built of a day. For thousands of years, Jews have understood that on this day, more than any other, it was possible to meet God.

At the heart of Yom Kippur is Teshuva—repentance. Yom Kippur beseeches us to seek forgiveness from other people, and then from God, for all the wrongs that have been committed in the previous year.



(From the book *Jewish Holidays: A Brief Introduction for Christians* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006)

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OPEN THE TENT

On Yom Kippur, God closes the Book of Life that was opened ten days earlier on Rosh Hashanah. In this book, God lists all the people who will live and die throughout the year. This is a frightening prospect, especially for those new to Judaism. In Empowering Ruth, a program of the Jewish Outreach Institute for women Jews-by-choice, we explain that everyone, righteous or otherwise, has the same opportunity to be inscribed in the Book of Life. We all stand equal before God. To provide a measure of comfort, we also offer a prayer for the High Holidays from Rabbi Kerry Olitzky:

May it be God's will to enable us to all come together next year, knowing full well that we might not find our way here during the days in between; and when the angel of death returns to threaten once again, may she leave this place empty-handed.



(From the curriculum of "Empowering Ruth," a program of the Jewish Outreach Institute for women who have recently chosen Judaism)

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REFLECTIONS

Rabbi Janet Marder of Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos, CA took a bold step forward in her Yom Kippur sermon when she invited those of other religious backgrounds who are raising Jewish children to come forward to the *bima* (the elevated section of the synagogue).

On the *bima*, in front of the entire congregation, she thanked them and she blessed them. She thanked them for both the "mundane" (driving the kids to Hebrew school) and for the sublime (casting their future lot with the Jewish people). This stirred a great deal of controversy in Reform congregations and beyond...

This time of year is a time of reflection. It is also a time of celebration, especially of the Jewish family for it contains the seeds of our future. And so we celebrate and welcome all those families raising Jewish children, and are especially appreciative of moms and dads of other religious backgrounds who have made the decision to raise their children as Jews. We welcome you into our synagogue with open arms and open hearts.



(From a blog entry by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; Oct. 5, 2006)

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SUKKOT

The holiday of Sukkot, sometimes referred to as *Hechag* (“the festival”) in the bible, celebrates both history and nature. After the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt, they wandered through the Sinai desert without shelter. The bible tells us that they lived in booths for forty years under God’s protection, but we do not know exactly what the booths looked like. Today, Jews approximate what they might have looked like by building small wooden huts. Many Jews build these booths in their backyards or on their porches or decks. Almost all synagogues build *Sukkot* for communal use and for use by those who cannot build their own.

Sukkot is also called *z’man simchateinu*, “the time of our joy.” Because the holiday occurs so soon after Yom Kippur, where we have come face to face with our morality, the holiday of Sukkot is something of a relief. We exhale the solemnity of Yom Kippur and embrace a holiday where we bring palms and lemonlike citrons to the synagogue.



(From the book *Jewish Holidays: A Brief Introduction for Christians* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006)

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OPEN THE TENT

Sukkot, with its emphasis on spending time outdoors, offers some great, low barrier opportunities to find people and reach them where they are at, especially on college campuses. In working with Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, JOI has come up with a Sukkot program called Harvest Festival. This involves setting up a mini farmers market within and around the sukkah, which is situated in a well trafficked, outdoor space on campus. Last Sukkot, the program was held at the University of Minnesota and the University of Vermont, with great results. Here's what some participants had to say:

“This was the epitome of great programming. There was an educational component. We taught people about the connection between Judaism and the environment. We were in the middle of campus. People got something free, an apple, no less, and in exchange for us getting their information, they had the potential to win free groceries. We definitely should repeat this program next year.”

—Sarah, U of M.

“The Farmers Market in the Sukkah was a great success as an abundance of students stopped by the table to ask about the holiday, buy food, and just say hello. It was a very good location for the event, and the people working behind the tables were excellent.” Overall, it was very successful!”

—Adam, UVM

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REFLECTIONS

Like so many of the Jewish holidays, Sukkot epitomizes the value of *hakhnasat orchim* (the welcoming of visitors). Various programs encourage hospitality in the sukkah, especially *ushpizin*, where those who live in the past are invited into the present.

Perhaps the practice of *ushpizin* is also our way of acknowledging the role that our ancestors continue to play in our lives and our hope that the values that they taught and represented continue to live on through the lives we lead.

To the traditional characters of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David (which emerge from the Zohar text [5:103b]), feminists have added additional visitors such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Perhaps we can add to the list: Moses' wife Zipporah (“the local minister's daughter”); Ruth (the Moabite woman who cast her lot with the Jewish people); and Esther (whose interfaith marriage led to the saving of the Jewish community of ancient Persia).

So if these are all of our models, and these are the values that they represent, then we need to make sure that one thing is clear: All are welcome to dwell in the sukkah, whether it represents the thatched hut in our backyards or the entire Jewish community.



(From a blog entry by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; Sept. 26, 2007)

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SIMCHAT TORAH

ESSENTIALS

On one day of the year, Jews are instructed to delight with the Torah. The holiday of Simchat Torah literally means “joy of Torah.” Participating in the joy of Torah on this day means one thing: dancing. In almost any synagogue you might attend, the holiday is marked by joyful circle dances around the Torah. Simchat Torah begins right after Shemini Atzeret ends (in the Reform tradition, Simchat Torah and Shemini Atzeret are observed on the same day.) Simchat Torah celebrates the transition from concluding the public reading of the Torah for one year to immediately beginning the reading for the following year.



(From the book *Jewish Holidays: A Brief Introduction for Christians* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006)

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OPEN THE TENT

Everyone can get into a Simchat Torah ceremony embellished in song and dance. It's a universal expression of joy, and that's what the holiday is all about. But with the growing diversity of today's Jewish families, not everyone will necessarily understand the meaning behind the holiday. As a way to include those of other religious backgrounds into the holiday, the staff of the Jewish Outreach Institute came up with some alternatives to the standard approach to Simchat Torah:

Many communities unfurl the entire Torah as part of the holiday celebration, which allows everyone to come close to the Torah—to hold it, to touch it. And no one is checking Jewish credentials. Perhaps we can use this opportunity to model other times of the year where people of all religious backgrounds can come close to the Torah.

Since everyone will be dancing, why not host a dance marathon for Simchat Torah? Designing an activity that requires no prior knowledge will lower the barrier to participation and help those new to the holiday feel welcome and included in the celebration.

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Laura Samberg Faino and Michael Faino

REFLECTIONS

While Simchat Torah is a day set aside to celebrate the Torah, nearly every week a synagogue or Jewish institution uses the Torah as part of another celebration: a bar or bat mitzvah. But interfaith families often come across the difficult situation of when and how family and friends from other religious backgrounds can take part in this important lifecycle event, especially in terms of who can come close to the Torah.

Can a mother who is of another religious background join her Jewish spouse in reciting the blessings before and after the Torah reading? Can grandparents from another religious background pass the Torah to their children and grandchild? If the bylaws of your congregation or movement restrict those of other religious backgrounds' interactions with the Torah and other set rituals, can family and friends from other faiths participate in "contrived" rituals, such as additional readings and blessings?

The bar and bat mitzvah celebrates Jewish continuity by giving the honoree the privilege of reading from the Torah. The family that brought him to this point should similarly be honored, including the family members of a different faith. What better way to show our appreciation than also giving them the privilege to come close to the Torah?



(Adapted from For Interfaith Parents Planning Bar or Bat Mitzvah: A Guide for Rabbis and Synagogues by STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal) in partnership with the Jewish Outreach Institute for the program Call Synagogue Home, which focuses on making synagogues more welcoming to interfaith families during lifecycle events)

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HANUKKAH

ESSENTIALS

Hanukkah means “rededication,” and it refers to the eight-day rededication of the ancient temple in Jerusalem, which had been defiled by the Syrian-Greeks in an attempt to totally Hellenize Jerusalem and Israel. Hanukkah is observed for eight days throughout the Jewish world in celebration of this miraculous victory of the spirit. When the rabbis sensed that the military victory of the Maccabees was taking precedence in the minds of the Jewish people, they introduced the notion of the miraculous cruse of oil. According to tradition, the oil burned for eight days—or, at least, the miraculous victory was so great it seemed as if the Temple menorah glowed throughout the eight-day festival of rededication.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

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OPEN THE TENT

Hanukkah is second only to Passover as the Jewish holiday most celebrated by American Jews. Many families light menorahs, spin dreidels, and open presents. But why stop there? Here are some more ways to incorporate a few new memories into your family's celebration of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights:

Hold a latke cook off. Latkes, the Yiddish word for "potato pancakes," are popular treats fried in oil eaten on Hanukkah. Fry up a batch of your own, and invite friends and neighbors over to sample each other's recipes. Mix up your recipes by adding broccoli, zucchini or sweet potatoes or topping the latkes with smoked salmon or caviar.

Visit a planetarium or laser light show. Expand your Hanukkah celebration of light by finding other lights in your community to learn about. Check out the website of your local science museum to see their planetarium and light show offerings. Rejoice in festive, holiday lights by taking in the constellations or a beautiful light show. If there are no science museums in your area, visit a field or park on a clear night to view the constellations.



(From the article "Ten Tips for Celebrating Hanukkah with Your Family" by Liz Marcovitz, New Jersey Jewish News, 2006)

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REFLECTIONS

In almost every Jewish community, Lubavitch Hasidim (Chabad) holds public menorah-lighting ceremonies—often in partnership with other institutions like Jewish Community Centers—that attracts tens of thousands of participants nationally.

JOI runs "Public Space Judaism™" programs like "Eight Days of Oil: Hanukkah Olive Oil Tasting," which celebrates Hanukkah in local malls and shopping centers because in December, that's where people are! The greatest thing about these and other programs is that they place Judaism in the "public square," an important idea whose time has come.

By inviting everyone to celebrate, regardless of affiliation, identification, or family make up, these programs give the message that *Judaism is accessible*. They allow people with varied connections to Judaism to be part of something special, to embrace their Jewish connection out in the open. In this way, after the Hanukkah candles have burned down, their lights will continue to brighten people's lives through a warm and welcoming Jewish community.



(Adapted from the article "For Hanukkah, Bigger is Better" by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Telegraphic Agency; December 2003)

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TU B'SHEVAT

Tu B'Shevat offers us a stepping stone to the spring. According to the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:1), the fifteenth of Shevat was the cutoff date for determining when the fruit of the tree was to be tithed. The fruit of a tree which matured prior to this date was to be counted toward the previous year. After that date, it was part of next year's tithing. Thus, Tu (for *tet-vav*, from the alpha numeric expression of the number 15) B'Shevat became the festival of trees, or literally the "new year" of the trees. The date was chosen because the night of the fifteenth is bathed in the light of the full moon rather than the new moon at the beginning of the month. Most of the rain has fallen in Israel by the month of Shevat and the trees begin to drink from it. As a result, their sap begins to flow.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

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OPEN THE TENT

The Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shevat is a time to celebrate trees and appreciate nature. There are many ways to celebrate the holiday, but here are a few JOI favorites:

Plant a tree. Some people symbolically plant trees in Israel by making a donation to the Jewish National Fund. Others plant trees in their own neighborhood or donate to environmental organizations in the United States such as the Nature Conservancy.

Plant parsley. Perhaps not as impressive as planting trees, but definitely a fun project to do with the kids. If all goes well, you'll have home grown parsley to use at a Passover seder in April.

Attend a Tu B'Shevat Seder. If you can't find one in your area, you can make your own. Even if you don't have a formal Seder, you can mark the day with your family by eating a variety of fruits and nuts.

Participate in a service project to benefit the environment. Your family can do a neighborhood clean-up project or another service project that benefits the earth.



(From a post by JOI program officer Elizabeth Stoll to the Mothers Circle listserve, a free moderated email discussion group for women who are not Jewish but are raising their children Jewish in the context of intermarriage; Jan 8, 2008)

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REFLECTIONS

Tu B'Shevat is a celebration of land, and no land is more important to the Jewish community than Israel. In the past couple of years, there has been a proliferation of interfaith trips to Israel—among them Israel Encounter, based in Atlanta, and Interfaith Connections in San Francisco. In the case of Israel Encounter, funding allows the spouse of another religion the opportunity to travel for free, lowering the cost barrier and attracting more participants.

What these and other interfaith trips do is put Judaism in a global context, showing the diversity of the worldwide Jewish community. By being able to experience Israel first hand, the connection to a shared history grows stronger, and Jewish continuity is a greater possibility. These trips help encourage interfaith couples to increase their engagement in the Jewish community, which in turn will strengthen the entire North American Jewish Community.



(Adapted from a blog entry by JOI communications associate Levi Fishman on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; June 11, 2008)

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PURIM

“On Purim,” says a Jewish proverb, “everything is permissible.” Purim is the one time of the year when the normal rules of behavior are suspended somewhat, when even the most devout Jews dare to make a mockery of things that are normally considered sacred. But Jewish piety is a balance, a mix of the spiritual and the physical. It is out of this context that the Purim celebration is born. But remember, “Be happy. It’s Adar.”

The festival of Purim celebrates the successful overthrow of a plot to destroy the Jews of ancient Persia. Its establishment as a feast is recounted in Esther 9:20-28. The name Purim is said to come from the word for “lots” or “marked stones” which Haman, the villain in the story, uses to arbitrarily pick the date on which he intends to annihilate the Persian Jewish community. While there is some scholarly debate about the historical veracity of what is accounted in Megillat Esther, the essential message of survival rings true for Jews in all generations, including our own.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

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JOI has developed a variety of programs for Purim, specifically those that reflect the criteria for Public Space JudaismSM, where we take Jewish programming out to where the people are. We have programs for Hamantaschen baking in a grocery store, or wine tasting in a wine shop. But the most common Purim program is still the synagogue or JCC carnival that takes place all across North America. Purim carnivals offer great outreach opportunities that usually fall within the category of what we call Open Door CommunitySM programs. These are low barrier programs that usually take place on the grounds of or inside a Jewish communal institution, such as a synagogue or Jewish Community Center.

Many institutions take these carnivals for granted since they typically reach those who are already inside the community. Often we overlook the assets that we have for outreach potential. Purim carnivals are among such activities that can be maximized in order to extend their reach into the community, and it is wonderful to already see some institutions moving Purim carnivals into public spaces that are easily accessible by all, particularly interfaith families who may be on the periphery of the Jewish community.



(From a blog entry by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; March 12, 2008)

AMBASSADOR DONOR

Abby Joseph Cohen and David Cohen

REFLECTIONS

The story of the Jewish holiday of Purim sounds like it could have been written by crime novelist Raymond Chandler. A pretty young dame with a secret marries a guy with a whole lot of dough. What follows is a tale of intrigue, deception, money, sex, murder and, ultimately, redemption.

It's also a story of intermarriage. The Jewish community was on the brink of annihilation, but when Ahasuerus, the King of Persia, found out his wife Esther was Jewish, he cast his lot with the Jewish people and we were saved from destruction.

Today, it's no secret that intermarriage is not looked upon favorably by many in the Jewish community. Parents fear that if their children marry outside of the religion, the religion won't last very long. But that doesn't have to be the case. Certainly some Jews have left the fold, but we also have hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish family members who are equally dedicated to preserving the Jewish identity. Purim is a good opportunity to honor and thank them.

Esther and her uncle Mordechai were heroes, but so was King Ahashuerus, who "married in" to the Jewish people. If we are willing to bring the intermarried into our Jewish family, we too will live to see another day.



(Adapted from the article "Jewish Holiday of Acceptance" By Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Metro Newspaper, New York; March 20, 2008)

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PASSOVER

ESSENTIALS

The story of Pesach (Passover) begins many centuries ago when God commanded Moses to go to Egypt and ask King Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh was not afraid of Moses and would not let the people go. After Moses and his brother Aaron left the palace, terrible things began to happen to the Egyptians. First the water turned to blood. Then followed grasshoppers, swarming insects, frogs, hail, and even darkness. The last of the ten plagues was the worst of all. Every firstborn Egyptian male child died, but the angel of God passed over the homes of the Israelites. Finally, Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites leave Egypt. Because they left in haste, their bread did not have time to rise. Matzah is eaten today at the Pesach family dinner, called a Seder, to commemorate the unleavened bread of the Israelites when they departed from Egypt.

The Pesach Seder is a reenactment of this amazing story of freedom. Traditionally, it is held on both the first and second night of Peach.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

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OPEN THE TENT

As one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays in America, Passover provides a wonderful opportunity for reaching out to unaffiliated Jews and intermarried families. That's why JOI created Passover in the Matzah Aisle, a program which reaches out to Jewish families (including unaffiliated and intermarried households) in supermarkets right before Passover. Passover in the Matzah Aisle places outreach workers and volunteers right in the matzah aisle, in order to encounter people *where they are*: doing their last minute Passover shopping.

In 2008, Congregation B'nai Israel of Danbury, CT, brought a taste of Passover to their local Super Stop & Shop. Throughout the day, they had enthusiastic synagogue volunteers ready to meet, greet, and offer a Passover treat to passers-by. Skillfully led by volunteer Doreen Waver, this small, Conservative congregation did a wonderful job of gathering and training volunteers for the event. At any given moment, a shopper could have been greeted by a team of six outreach volunteers! This truly shows that running successful Public Space JudaismSM programming can be done—and done very well—by even one small organization!



(Adapted from a blog entry by JOI senior program officer Eva Stern on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; April 18, 2008)

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REFLECTIONS

Whether in prayer or conversation, the words we use are not taken lightly in Judaism, especially when they are harmful to others. Jewish law actually likens the act of embarrassing a person to murder. And the Talmud, the primary source book for Jewish law, teaches that gossiping is equivalent to the murder of three people.

As you sit around the Passover Seder table this year, be conscious of the words you use to describe others. Consider their impact because all too often we forget that words have the power to marginalize and oppress members of our society.

This holiday, we invite you to make this pledge and bring it your Seder table: "I promise to the best of my ability to eliminate from my vocabulary all words that are hurtful, insensitive and oppressive of others, and include only words that are welcoming, sensitive and liberating."

Inclusive language is the first step toward creating a truly inclusive—and fully free from oppression—Jewish community.



(From the article "At Seder Table, Pledge Exodus from Negative Language," by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Liz Marcovitz, published by the JTA, April 6, 2008)

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YOM HASHOAH

ESSENTIALS

In 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. By the end of World War II (1945), he had destroyed six million Jews (and three million non-Jews) as part of his “Final Solution” to ethnically cleanse Germany and the lands he took by force and make them free of Jews. Yom Hashoah is a reminder that as Jews we must all think of ourselves as having lost family during the Holocaust, just as we imagine ourselves as having been slaves in Egypt during the observance of Pesach.

A resolution of the Knesset, Israel’s national legislature, on April 12, 1951 designated the twenty-seventh of Nisan as “Holocaust and Ghetto Uprising Day, a day of perpetual remembrance for the House of Israel.” Outside Israel, in the early years of the observance, it was customary to memorialize the Holocaust on April 19th, the day on which the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began. The tenth of Tevet was established by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate as the day of Yahrzeit for Kaddish to be said by relatives of those who had lost family in the Holocaust.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

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OPEN THE TENT

The summer before I entered sixth grade, my teacher assigned *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* as summer reading. From that point on, I knew that if I ever visited Amsterdam, I would visit the Frank family's hiding place detailed in the compelling diary. The almost one million visitors to Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam in 2006 verifies that, like me, people all over the world are interested in seeing the apartment where this young symbol of the Holocaust kept her diary.

The Holocaust is a major point of self-identification for Jews as evidenced by numerous visitors to the Frank's Amsterdam apartment. Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, only falls once a year, but it is not too early to start planning a memorial program. Most North Americans have studied the Holocaust and are aware of its ongoing impact upon society. This includes unaffiliated, unengaged, and interfaith families. Explicitly invite and welcome all who are interested to your remembrance ceremony in order to include these populations. This year, open your Yom Hashoah commemoration to everyone—because no one should forget.



(From a blog entry by Liz Marcovitz, which appeared on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; Jan. 15, 2007)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Rene and Charles Chiara

REFLECTIONS

I wouldn't be here today if an older Polish couple didn't hide my mother's parents from the Nazis during the last two excruciatingly-long years of World War II. My grandmother lost her parents and all seven siblings in the gas chambers, and her first two children to the hardships of war.... When a woman like my grandmother—who carried so much of the weight of history on her shoulders—told her children and grandchildren that “if you marry a non-Jew, you finish Hitler's job,” it's not just hyperbole. It's gut-wrenching and very personal. And yet, it's not enough to prevent intermarriage. My grandmother's son intermarried, I intermarried, my sister married a child of intermarriage, and my cousin (himself a child of intermarriage) married a Jew-by-choice who was not yet Jewish when they began dating.

Perhaps what we all have in common was that the weight of a tragic past could not outweigh a potential future filled with love. Or perhaps we all instinctively recognized what is now one of our slogans here at JOI, that “intermarriage does not end Jewish continuity; not raising Jewish children ends Jewish continuity.” Or, perhaps most importantly, we could not define our current Jewish identities by the tragedies of our people's past.



(From a blog entry by JOI associate executive director Paul Golin on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; Oct. 23, 2006)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Jeri and Tom Konig

YOM HAZIKARON

ESSENTIALS

Israel's Memorial Day, Yom HaZikaron, takes place on the 4th of the Jewish month Iyar, the day before Israel's Independence Day. It commemorates and pays tribute to the soldiers who died fighting for Israel's independence and its subsequent wars and battles. It also functions as a remembrance for victims of all attacks against the Jewish and Israeli people, including those victims of recent terrorism. On Yom HaZikaron, Jews around the world think about and pay respect to Israel's fallen heroes.



(From the "How We Celebrate" section of the website www.JOI.org)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Betsy and Don Landis

OPEN THE TENT

When a person chooses to become Jewish, the process often involves the “what’s” and “why’s” of Judaism, but not the “how-to’s.” And one of the most challenging of the “how-to’s” is how to connect yourself spiritually with the thousands of years of Jewish tradition. In the Empowering Ruth curriculum, we offer the following questions for participants in a session titled “The Jewish Community and Israel:”

What comprises a Jewish community? What are the similarities and differences between the terms Jews, Jewish peoplehood, Jewish civilization and Am Yisrael? How do the various notions of Jewish people inform your Jewish journey? What role does Israel play in your life?

Through discussing Am Yisrael (The Nation of Israel), Jewish peoplehood, and Jewish civilization, the course helps connect those who are new to Judaism with the collective memory of the Jewish people. As such, they become part of the continuum of Judaism, sharing in all aspects of our history, from slavery through independence.



(From the curriculum of “Empowering Ruth,” a program of the Jewish Outreach Institute for women who have recently chosen Judaism)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr.

REFLECTIONS

Since its independence in 1948 Israel remains an island of democracy in a sea of totalitarian states. For more than 5 decades, its very existence has been subjected to a continued series of threats, wars and acts of terrorism from its neighbors. Its remarkable survival has been due to the inherent nature of its people, combined with strong support from Jews all over the world—especially in North America where memories of grandparents and of great grandparents fleeing from European anti-Semitism are still fresh.

The phenomenon of intermarriage presents a challenge and an opportunity in that it could either erode or enhance that support. We must work to raise the awareness in the Jewish community of opportunities inherent in welcoming interfaith couples. I remember the words of my dear colleague, David Belin of blessed memory, who said, “Judaism is not only a religion, but also a culture and a community of people bonded together by shared values...what some people call a ‘peoplehood’. Its gates are open to all, including those not born Jewish.”

By building these bridges and developing effective means of communication we can help to assure the creative perpetuation of Jewish culture and heritage in a free and open society. And at the same time insure the existence of a vibrant and active American Jewish population and continued support for Israel for generations to come.



(Adapted from the article “Help the Intermarried Keep Israel Strong” by JOI president emeritus Terry Elkes, z”l, which appeared on the website www.Interfaithfamily.com; June, 2002)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Reva and Alan B. Slifka

YOM HA'ATZMAUT

ESSENTIALS

In 1897, Theodor Herzl, known as the father of modern Zionism, convened the first Zionist congress in Basel, Switzerland. At the time the Turks ruled Palestine, only to be replaced by the British following World War I. In the 1930's, amid Arab pressure, the British issued several White Papers which limited immigration to Israel. The Jewish community responded with a flood of illegal immigration known as Aliyah Bet. Eventually, in the shadow of the Holocaust, the Jewish people refused to accept the rule of other nations any longer. We had been without a home for nearly 2,000 years.

Israel Independence Day falls on Iyar 5 and corresponds to May 14, 1948 (5708), the day on which the Declaration of Independence was issued and the state of Israel was established. The holiday itself was established by law in 1949. Yom Ha'atzmaut marks the rebirth of the modern state of Israel, the Third Commonwealth of the Jewish people.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Marion and Ronald Stein

OPEN THE TENT

Recently, I embarked upon my first journey to Ohio. The purpose of my trip? To help the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati maximize the outreach potential of “Celebrate as One”—a huge multicultural festival inspired by Israel’s 60th birthday... “Celebrate as One” brought in an incredibly diverse crowd of performers and attendees, and it was evident by the smiles, dancing, and captive audiences at Fountain Square’s three performance areas. Folks from the entire community clearly appreciated the talent and diversity reflected in the evening.

For one young adult I spoke with who grew up in the area, it was the first time he saw the Jewish community sponsoring something that he felt truly good about. We know that many folks, especially those of the younger generation, can feel turned off by a sense of exclusivity in Jewish events, and this evening certainly lowered that barrier. As Shep Englander, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, stated in an email to the Federation, “the multicultural openness attracted hundreds of younger and less engaged Jews, who never come to our ‘Jewish only events.’” We commend the Cincinnati Federation for putting on such a wonderful program, and for recognizing the connection between event themes and the potential to reach out to a previously unengaged population.



(From a blog entry by Eva Stern on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; May 20, 2008)

BENEFACTOR DONOR

Nicki and Harold Tanner

REFLECTIONS

Celebrating the creation of a Jewish state should mean celebrating a state for all Jews, regardless of family makeup or background. For interfaith couples in Israel, finding that foothold can be very difficult, even if they are raising a Jewish family. In America, intermarriage pushes the community to ask the big questions: what does it mean to be Jewish? How do we express our Judaism? Who is a Jew? It’s good to grapple with tough questions; that’s what Jews do. We will have a stronger community if we can provide compelling answers to those big questions.

Those same big questions are being confronted in Israel as well, even though many say they can barely find a non-Jew in the Israeli Jewish community. Who is a Jew in Israel? According to the government, not the thousands of patrilineal Russian immigrants who are eligible to die for their new country but not be buried in its Jewish cemeteries. While Israel is not our focus at JOI, our friends at the Half-Jewish Network and the Association for the Rights of Mixed Families have been advocating vocally for better treatment of the adult children of intermarriage by the religious authorities in Israel. This is a growing population, one that, if warmly welcomed, will help Israel live to see another 60 years.



(Adapted from Paul Golin’s conversation with journalist Shmuel Rosner as part of *Rosner’s Domain*, which appears as a regular column on the website of *Ha’aretz* Newspaper; March 30, 2008)

The President’s Advisory Board of JOI

LAG B'OMER

Lag B'Omer always falls on the eighteenth of the month of Iyar, thirty-three days after the beginning of Pesach. To lend special emphasis to the importance of the spring barley harvest, the Israelites were instructed to bring the omer (the yield of a sheaf of barley) to the Temple priest, beginning on the second day of Pesach. On this day they were to begin to count forty-nine days until Shavuot, the festival of the wheat harvest.

The counting takes place at nightfall, since the reaping of the omer took place at night. The method of counting was always to mention both the days and the weeks. For example, "This day completes thirty-three days, which is four weeks and five days." The counting is preceded by the recitation of special blessings.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

The Women's Advisory Board of JOI

OPEN THE TENT

The Counting of the Omer, which is a mourning period of sorts between Passover and Shavuot, originated as an agricultural tradition but became associated with tragic memories in Jewish history. Jews suspend the mourning period for one day during the Omer [on Lag B'Omer].

During mourning periods, Jews refrain from celebratory actions, such as listening to live music, going to weddings and celebrating joyous occasions like weddings. Traditionally observant Jews typically celebrate this day "off" of mourning with a field day celebration outdoors. While you are probably not observing the Omer as a mourning period, Lag B'Omer is a great chance for you to enjoy a day outdoors sharing in Jewish tradition with your family.

Because it does not involve hours at synagogue, fancy dress, complicated meals or even Hebrew, the holiday offers an easy yet meaningful way to celebrate with family and friends. Whether you choose to barbeque, play sports, or take part in the tradition of playing with bows and arrows, take some time on Lag B'Omer to enjoy the holiday with those you love.



(From a post by Liz Marcovitz to the Mothers Circle listserv, a free moderated email discussion group for women who are not Jewish but are raising their children Jewish in the context of intermarriage; May 1, 2007)

The Professionals' Advisory Board of JOI

REFLECTIONS

JOI often speaks about three different calendars that guide the American Jewish community. Yet the Jewish community's programming efforts generally focus on only one of them, namely, the Jewish calendar. But the others—the secular calendar and the cultural calendar—play an important part in our lives as well and demand that we program around them too, especially if we want to "reach people where they are" (in this case metaphysically as well as physically).

I realize that for many, especially those living on the periphery of the Jewish community, feeling in sync with the rhythm of this time may be challenging. I have a simple omer counting calendar that I keep on my dresser. And years ago I developed a more spiritual counter for use by participants in Synagogue 2000 (now Synagogue 3000).

Through the years creative liturgists have come up with all kinds of Omer calendars to help make the process more accessible. While the counting of the Omer is an easy ritual, it is not high on the list of introductory rituals that those new to Judaism generally undertake. Nevertheless, were all Jewish rituals so innovative and enjoyable, perhaps we might do them a little more.



(Adapted from a blog entry by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; May 3, 2006)

Empowering Ruth, a program of JOI

SHAVUOT

Shavuot falls on the sixth and seventh day of Sivan, and is celebrated for two days. In Israel and Reform Judaism, it is celebrated for one day.

Shavuot began as a spring harvest festival in Israel. The first wheat ripened approximately fifty days after the first barley. The first barley offering was brought to the Temple one day after Passover began. From that day on, the Jewish people were told to count seven complete weeks from one harvest to the other, and at the end of the counting they were commanded to celebrate the festival of Shavuot, which literally means “weeks.” The Torah also refers to Shavuot as *Chag Habikkurim*, the Festival of the First Fruits. Jews would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem bearing gift offerings of first fruits.

With the passing of time, Shavuot became more a celebration of God’s revelation and less a celebration of the harvest.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

The Mothers Circle, a program of JOI

OPEN THE TENT

Shavuot has become a defining moment in the history of the Jewish people since the rabbis chose to link the holiday with the giving of Torah on Mt. Sinai, but until recently it was one of those holidays observed by few outside of the traditionally observant. Lately, however, the reintroduction of a Kabbalistic tradition of *tikkun layl Shavuot* (a mystical custom to remain awake all night studying sacred Jewish texts) has breathed new life into a totally under-appreciated holiday.

So what do we do with those on the periphery? How do we help them to mark Shavuot? A few years ago, JOI applied its Public Space JudaismSM model to the late-night celebration of Shavuot and developed a program which was to utilize three local secular establishments: a coffee shop, book store, and the arts space of a local college. JOI called the program Up All Night: A Community Shavuot Celebration.

While it is fine to run programs serving a primarily already-engaged Jewish population, JOI believes staging a *tikkun* at a local coffee house or bookstore offers an excellent opportunity to connect with the entire Jewish community in a fresh context.



(Adapted from a blog entry by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; May 1, 2006)

The Grandparents Circle, a program of JOI

REFLECTIONS

Earlier this summer in Israel, a controversy broke out regarding the conversion of thousands of Jews over the last two decades. The Supreme Rabbinic Court found that a woman who had converted fourteen years ago had not only abandoned strict, orthodox ritual law, but at the time of her conversion she never even intended to be so observant. This ruling meant her conversion was null and void, her marriage was invalid, and her kids were not Jewish. What a way to make people feel welcome!

Shavuot is a spring holiday that celebrates the first harvest, the ripening of the first fruits, and most importantly, the giving of the Torah. On this holiday, it is customary to read the biblical story of Ruth, the first official Jewish convert. But Ruth didn't have to be sanctioned by a committee. She simply declared to her mother-in-law: "Your people will be my people; your God, my God." And that was enough.

It shouldn't matter if a conversion ceremony was elaborate, or a simple declaration followed by righteous deeds. Religions should be open to everyone searching for meaning, and Shavuot is a good time for Jews to recognize and appreciate all those who have chosen to become part of the community.



(From the article "Choosing a New Religion" by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, published by the online magazine On Faith, a joint venture of Newsweek and The Washington Post; June 5, 2008)

Big Tent Judaism, an advocacy initiative of JOI

TISHA B'AV

Tisha B'Av is considered the saddest day in the Jewish calendar. If you enter a synagogue on this day, you may see people with a solemn expression on their faces, sitting unshaven on low stools and chanting mournful dirges. The rituals of Tisha B'Av are similar to the Jewish rituals for mourning a loved one who has died, but the entire community mourns on Tisha B'Av. Similar to Yom Kippur, it's a full-day fast that actually lasts for twenty-five hours.

Tisha B'Av is literally a date—the ninth of Av. On the ninth and tenth of Av, in the year 70 CE, the Roman legions under Titus laid siege to the Temple in Jerusalem. In a bloody conflict, Roman soldiers killed the Jewish defenders of Jerusalem, set the Temple on fire, and sent the remaining Jews of Jerusalem into exile. The taking of Jerusalem by Titus was the culmination of years of civil war among the Jews and of Jewish political revolt against Roman authorities. Some scholars estimate that the violence in those years of revolt and civil war took over one million Jewish lives.



(From the book *Jewish Holidays: A Brief Introduction for Christians* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006)

Public Space Judaism, a program of JOI

OPEN THE TENT

I am what many in the Jewish community would label as an “insider.” I work for a Jewish organization, attend Shabbat services regularly and am an active participant on several committees at my synagogue, of which I am a proud dues-paying member. With that being the case, many of my fellow “insiders” assume that I’ll be spending a portion of my weekend fasting and at synagogue, observing Tisha B’Av, a day of mourning on the Jewish calendar. Last year was the first time I observed Tisha B’Av, choosing to fast and attend services several times with hopes of connecting to the power and meaning of the day. But by sun-down after a long day, I just found myself hungry and disappointed, not having felt any spiritual or religious connection.

This year I’d like to do my part to ensure that in the future, no community will ever have a reason to mourn for the same reasons that many will fast this Saturday night and Sunday. We can not reverse history, but we can make a difference for communities that currently face devastation, including the refugees of Darfur and the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. For those on the “inside” or “outside,” fasting all day or not, why not take a moment to reflect and even act to make certain that no other People have a day of mourning like Tisha B’Av?



(From a blog entry by JOI program officer Lily Matusiak on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; August 7, 2008)

The Staff of JOI

REFLECTIONS

Every year I struggle with Tisha B’Av and its relevance, always looking to infuse the day with new meaning. Perhaps part of the struggle is that I can’t mourn for the destruction of the Temple when a vibrant Israel and a rebuilt Jerusalem continues to enrich me. But friends in Israel, which just weeks ago seemed serene—albeit constantly vigilant of terrorist activity—are spending their time in bomb shelters. Unfortunately, I look at the world and find too many reasons to be sad and mournful. So do we fast today to mourn the tragedies? Do we experience it the way our ancestors did, in a posture of penitence and self-reflection, given all that is going on in the Middle East?

Whatever decisions we make with regard to observance (some also choose a middle road and end the fast midday), we pray that just as our people experienced the joy of eventual return to Jerusalem following the destruction of the Temple and the exile that followed, we may soon see a day of peace and a return to the tranquility of holiness in the Land.



(From a blog entry by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; August 3, 2006)

*In memory of David Belin,
Founding President of JOI*

SHABBAT

Shabbat is an oasis of calm at the end of the week, a time to relax and enjoy time with the family. It is marked by rituals and customs intended to celebrate it as a joyful day of rest.

“Shabbat” is the Hebrew word for Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. According to the Torah, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. To recall this, Jews rest on the seventh day. On the Jewish calendar, the seventh day is Saturday. Because Jewish holidays begin on sunset the previous day, Shabbat begins Friday evening. It lasts until sunset on Saturday night.

Shabbat often begins with a short ceremony at home, followed by a family dinner. It ends with a brief ceremony called “havdalah.” “Havdalah” means “separation.” These two ritual bookends mark Shabbat as time separate from the week. All week long we work. Shabbat is a day for rest, for prayer, for good food, and for enjoying the company of our friends and family.



(From the curriculum of “The Mothers Circle,” a program of the Jewish Outreach Institute for women of other religious backgrounds who are raising Jewish children within the context of intermarriage)

*In memory of Terry Elkes,
President Emeritus of JOI*

OPEN THE TENT

JOI believes one of the best ways to engage the unaffiliated Jewish community is through Public Space JudaismSM—instead of waiting for people to come to us, we need to go out to them. This idea was recently put into practice by the University of Maryland Hillel, which sponsored “Shabbat Across Maryland,” or SHAM, a program that strives to make Shabbat more accessible to students. According to an article in the *Washington Jewish Week*, kosher dinners were held at over 70 locations, which was quite different from the centralized, large scale Shabbats that Hillel had organized in years past. Many students found these settings to be more intimate, including junior Megan Eckstein. She commented that the SHAM Shabbat experience “definitely felt more accessible and welcoming. This gave me a chance to really feel like part of the Jewish community.”

After attending a SHAM Shabbat dinner, Eckstein said she would like to hold a Shabbat dinner in her own home, allowing her friends the opportunity to connect with the Jewish community outside the walls of the Hillel building. This student, as well as an estimated 1,000 other student participants, showed that meaningful Shabbat experiences can happen anywhere, as long as the doors are open for anyone who would like to attend.



(From a blog entry by Lily Matusiak on the website of the Jewish Outreach Institute, www.JOI.org; Jan. 22, 2008)

*In memory of Egon Mayer,
Founding Director of JOI*

REFLECTIONS

There is an especially poignant prayer said every Friday evening by parents gathered around the Sabbath dinner table, after candlelighting, to bless their children. Jewish tradition invites us to speak these words of blessing specifically through the legacy of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were children of the Biblical Joseph and whose grandfather Jacob took as his own. In this selfless deed, Jacob continued the line of the Biblical patriarchs and matriarchs through his grandchildren, born to him by his son Joseph and Egyptian daughter-in-law Asnat.

The Bible is not concerned with her particular family of origin for she, like so many today that live in our community's midst, chose to cast her lot with the Jewish people and voluntarily establish a Jewish home and raise Jewish children. Once Jacob and Joseph were reunited in Egypt, Jacob did not distance his non-Jewish daughter-in-law or withhold his love for her or her children based on her origins. Their legacy is insured through their inclusive action, and their example should be held up for today's community. As for Asnat's act of love towards the Jewish people, we have rewarded her with blessing in her children's name—and included our own children—but it is really she who has blessed us.



(From the article “A Moment of Truth for Your Family, Every Week” by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, which appeared on the website www.Interfaithfamily.com; Jan. 2002)

*In memory of David G. Sacks,
Founding Chairman of the Board of JOI*

CALENDAR

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|---------------|--|------------|------------|
| ROSH HASHANAH | Sept. 18th | Sept. 8th | Sept. 28th |
| YOM KIPPUR | Sept. 27th | Sept. 17th | Oct. 7th |
| SUKKOT | Oct. 2nd | Sept. 22nd | Oct. 12th |
| SIMCHAT TORAH | Oct. 10th | Sept. 30th | Oct. 20th |
| HANUKKAH | Dec. 11th | Dec. 1st | Dec. 20th |
| TU B'SHEVAT | Feb. 8th | Jan. 29th | Jan 19th |
| PURIM | March 9th | Feb. 27th | March 19th |
| PASSOVER | April 8th | March 29th | April 18th |
| YOM HASHOAH | April 20th | April 10th | April 30th |
| YOM HAZIKARON | April 27th | April 18th | May 8th |
| YOM HAATZMAUT | April 28th | April 19th | May 9th |
| LAG B'OMER | May 11th | May 1st | May 21st |
| SHAVUOT | May 28th | May 18th | June 7th |
| TISHA B'AV | July 29th | July 19th | August 8th |
| SHABBAT | Every Friday Night to Saturday Night, Sunset to Sundown | | |

Why do Jewish holidays fall on a different day each year?

The Jewish calendar's months are fixed by the cycle of the moon, while the years are fixed by the earth's cycle around the sun. This coordination of lunar and solar phenomena ensures that the Jewish holiday will occur in their proper seasons as specified in the Bible, even though their dates in the secular civil calendar, which is based only on the earth's movement around the sun, differ each year.



(From the book *Sacred Celebrations: A Jewish Holiday Handbook* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Ronald H. Isaacs, 1994; KTAV Publishing House)

About the Jewish Outreach Institute

The Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI) is a national, independent, nondenominational organization dedicated to creating a more inclusive Jewish community for intermarried families and disengaged Jews, by working to transform existing institutions and by creating new programs where necessary.



Vision

The future of the North American Jewish community will be determined by the warmth, wisdom and caring with which we welcome and engage intermarried families and unaffiliated Jews into our midst.



Mission

The Jewish Outreach Institute honors Jewish values by promoting a more welcoming and inclusive North American Jewish community that embraces intermarried families and unengaged Jews, and encourages their increased participation in Jewish life.

What is JOI's Goal?

JOI believes that ultimately Jewish "community" and "peoplehood" are what helps insure Jewish "continuity." JOI seeks to increase the size of the actively involved Jewish community through: innovative programs of outreach; advocacy for a more inclusive community; research on intermarriage and the effectiveness of outreach; and training of Jewish professionals and volunteer leaders to better welcome newcomers.



How Is JOI's Outreach Strategy Unique?

At JOI, "outreach" means going to where the people are both physically and metaphysically, rather than waiting for them to come to us. JOI brings programming to familiar and comfortable public spaces such as malls, bookstores, and supermarkets. We train Jewish communal professionals to recognize that each individual or household is on a unique Jewish journey. We must find out from them what it is they want, need, and are interested in adding to their lives.



Our Success So Far

During the past eight years, JOI has partnered with local Jewish agencies in more than 50 communities to draw over 150,000 participants into Jewish programs and activities. Half of these people were not previously involved in Jewish life, and about half were from intermarried households. JOI has also partnered with over 60 local and national organizations to offer intensive professional training in outreach to over 1,200 Jewish communal professionals, and informal outreach education and advocacy to an additional 1,900 Jewish professionals.