



## WINTER 2009-2010 NEWSLETTER

### December-January Calendar

12/20 Sunday: Volunteer Day. 11am – 3pm  
Help rebuild the Shul.

12/24 Thursday: Lower East Side Movie Night (*Hester Street, Crossing Delancey*) and kosher Chinese dinner (Buddha Bodhai). RSVP online: [stantonstshul.com](http://stantonstshul.com).

12/31 Thursday: Last day to make 2009 tax-deductible contribution to Stanton Street Shul

1/23 Shabbat: Women's Tefillah and Torah reading. 9:30 am.

1/23 Motzei Shabbat, 7:30 pm: Guest speaker Dr. Debra Blank: "Imahot in Pirkei Avot." Dr. Blank is currently Hadassah-Brandeis scholar-in-residence at Brandeis University.

1/30 Shabbat: Tu b'Shvat seder and luncheon.

### LIFECYCLES

Mazel Tov to Dr. Martin Wilner and Jessica Zorn, who had a daughter, Amalia Frida; to Tricia Davies and Jeremy Blumenfeld, who had a daughter, Annabel Yaffa; to David Gordon and Julia Wolfe on Yael Gordon's bat mitzvah

Refuah Shleimah to Calvin Berkowitz

We mourn the loss of member Barnee Abrams, z"l.

Member David Friedman's art is in an exhibit curated by Tobi Kahn at SAJ, 15 W. 86<sup>th</sup> Street, through Jan. 8. Some of David's newest, never-before-exhibited works are on display, along with art by Rachel Kantor and Susan Kaplow. For appointment: 212-724-7000

## **From the Rabbi**

Dear Friends,

It is with great pride that I write this letter. Programming and development have steadily increased at the Shul in the past year, providing our community with sustainable, continual growth as well as improvement to the synagogue building.

We all know of the significance of the Stanton Street Shul building. Built in 1912, the Shul is one of the last remnants of the thriving historic Jewish Lower East Side. Thanks to the diligence and support of our community, the building endures as a symbol of our history, one that is immediately apparent to anyone who enters.

Even so, the significance of the building pales in comparison to the importance of its members. Our sages teach, "Al tistakel be'kankan, ela bemah sheyesh bo." – Do not look at the vessel but what is inside it (M. Avot 4:2); for even a distinguished synagogue requires people to give it life.

Here, too, the Stanton Street Shul has thrived not only as a building but as a community. Thanks to the commitment of its members, our synagogue continues to welcome Jews of all backgrounds and provide an intimate and inspirational service. Our Friday night service is always lively with the singing of Kabbalat Shabbat, and our women's Torah readings provide participatory opportunities rarely found in Orthodox congregations. These services exist due to the commitment and devotion of the community.

We offer two regular classes catering to our diverse membership: On Tuesdays at 7pm, Introduction to Judaism provides a fresh approach to the fundamentals. For those interested in text study, on Sundays at 9am, following our Sunday 8am minyan, we analyze primary sources on traditional and contemporary topics such as erubin, electricity, economics and social justice, and Rabbinic thought and theology. These classes bring together friends of all backgrounds, not only to engage with traditional texts but also to encounter one another.

If you have been an active member for the past year, I would like to thank you for your contributions. If you've stopped by once or twice, let me invite you to come back. We'd love to see you again!

--Rabbi Josh Yuter

### **Rabbi's Classes**

Tuesdays, 7 pm, INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM

Sundays, 9 am, TEXT STUDY: Scheduled topics: 12/13 Eretz Yisrael; 12/20 Mashiah; 12/27 Rabbinic and Communal Leadership; 1/3 Popular Practice and the Process of Pesak - Role of Custom in Jewish Law; 1/10 Humra - Stringencies in Rabbinic Legal Thought; 1/17 Mar'it 'Ayin - Keeping up Appearances; 1/24 Halakha V'Ein Morin Kein - The Laws Which Shall Not Be Taught

## **Vice Presidents' Message**

Dear Friends,

Composing this newsletter takes us back a few years, as we reread the newsletter written for Passover 2007. At that time, Dov Kleiner was vice-president, Jonny Shore was ubiquitous and Yossi Pollack was rabbi.

A lot has changed since then. Dov, Jonny, Yossi and others have moved away, and in their place are many talented, active new members. The tides of change always exert a strong pull on our Shul, which was founded by a wave of immigrants.

Stanton Street Shul is one of a kind, providing an historic look back for a new generation. Going forward, we benefit from the enthusiasm, ideas, involvement and input of both our young and older members.

In this newsletter you'll read about the projects underway at the Shul: volunteer days, conservation of the mazelos, minyanim, classes, women's Torah readings. Our Shul is a scrappy survivor.

In order to go forward, we must shore up our financial stability. The Stanton Street Shul has been around a long time, but its survival is not a given. With your support, we hope to keep our synagogue vibrant, relevant and healthy for many years to come.

--Jessica Loeser and Malka Percal, co-Vice Presidents

## **FINANCIAL UPDATE**

So far this year there is both good and bad news. The good news is that our membership and High Holiday drives were a success. We have about 86 member units for fiscal year 2010 so far, as opposed to about 60 member units last year. That's an increase of over 40%, which is remarkable. In late summer, we set a High Holiday fundraising goal of \$18,000. This goal was achieved thanks to many generous donations. Thanks very much to everyone who participated and made our Holidays such a success.

The bad news is that, unfortunately, our membership and High Holiday drives only cover about half of our annual budget needs. Please keep the Shul in mind when considering year-end charitable donations. And thanks for helping lead the success of your Shul.

--Neal Picker, Treasurer

## **WANTED: KIDDUSH CHEF**

Our Shul is seeking an experienced individual to prepare and present the weekly kiddush. Chef will plan the menu (food and supplies will be provided) and prepare/present a light kiddush most weeks. This should take no more than two hours. More elaborate kiddushim, once a month, may require four hours to prepare and present. Reasonable hourly wage. Contact: [events@stantonstshul.com](mailto:events@stantonstshul.com)

## LEGACY GIVING

The Stanton Street Shul is one of the last remaining tenement shuls in the Lower East Side. It is housed in one of the last shul buildings in use as a shul. The immigrant generation created the Shul from the sweat of their brows when they were poor. Subsequent generations need to assure that the immigrants' contribution to American Jewish history is perpetuated and that the Shul's continuity is assured now and for future generations.

By restoring the mazelos, the Jewish zodiac folk art on the walls of the main sanctuary, we have become the bearers of this once-common tradition of synagogue decoration. Visitors constantly tour our Shul to learn about the historical origins and contributions of those who lived here **and** about the living community that davens here today.

We need your help in planning for the future. We are asking members and friends of the Shul to think about planned giving, which allows part of one's estate to go to the Shul (we are a registered charity) in a tax-protected manner. This is especially good for those who may not have much cash but have life insurance or an apartment as part of their estate. Gifts can take different forms:

**Bequest** - Outright gift of an estate to the Shul, including the option of giving 10%, or whatever value specified, of real estate assets.

**Charitable Lead Trust** - The Shul receives income from the donor's assets for a specific period of time.

**Charitable Remainder Trust** - All invested income goes to the donor during their lifetime; what is left in the trust then goes to the Shul.

To set up a donation, please consult your lawyer, and if possible notify the Shul about your intentions.

-- Elissa Sampson Boyarin

## VOLUNTEER DAY: A Call to Renewal

Going with the idea "fix it and they will come," a group of volunteers is repairing our historic Shul. Led by uptown residents Marty Radburd and Shauna Wreschner, volunteers gather regularly in a miniature Jewish version of Habitat that helps preserve old synagogues. Their work is appreciated by our "Shul on a shoestring."

Over the past several years, Marty and Shauna have organized workdays and trained volunteers, both from the Shul and outside, in skills such as spackling, painting and basic cleaning. Walls have been spackled and painted, floors swept and carpets vacuumed, yahrzeit memorials rewired, supplies organized and shemos taken for burial. Tons of detritus have been removed.

On Sunday, Oct. 18, Marty and Shauna, board members and volunteers cleared and organized the storage area behind the kitchen; scraped and plastered the bottom

half of the wall in the main sanctuary; cleaned sanctuary benches and tested them for paint stripping; mopped floors; repaired the parochet; and refueled with bagels, lox and a docent talk.

Please join us on Sunday, Dec. 20, from 11 to 3, to restore our historic synagogue. Bring friends; come even if only for an hour. Students can receive a community service note for their institution of learning.

## **WOMEN'S TORAH READING: A Unique Opportunity**

Women's services at Stanton Street are, by now, something of a tradition. About five years ago, we started having a women's megillah reading every Purim. The following year we added a women's Simhat Torah reading. Last year we began to have Torah readings and musaf services several times a year, and this year we increased that number to five. On January 23, for the first time, we will do the entire Shabbat morning service.

My own experience with women's Torah/tefillah dates back to my college years, but I became involved on a more regular basis about 10 years ago after I organized a women's service for my daughter's bat mitzvah at another downtown synagogue. Our tefillah group continued to meet for years afterward. Now some of the same women are involved in women's services at Stanton Street. To my knowledge, we are the only group that holds women's Torah readings in the downtown area. Women travel from all over the city to attend and take part, and readings usually culminate in a special kiddush and a guest speaker.

Our most recent women's Torah reading and musaf service on Nov. 14 was attended by more than 20 women. Many of them were able to take an active role in the service in some form: reading Torah or haftorah, serving as gabbai'ot, getting aliyot, doing hagbah and gelilah, or leading davening.

For many women, especially those who have never had an aliyah or seen the inside of a sefer Torah, this type of direct participation is a very special experience. The singing is spirited, and there is a real sense of community.

The next women's Torah reading and women's tefillah is on January 23. We are in need of organizers, leyners, and other participants for the service. That evening at 7:30 pm, we present special guest speaker Dr. Debra Blank. Dr. Blank, the Hadassah-Brandeis scholar-in-residence at Brandeis University, will discuss "Imahot in Pirkei Avot." Please come and bring your friends. To become involved, contact [stantonstreetwomen@gmail.com](mailto:stantonstreetwomen@gmail.com).

--Rachel Mincer

## **RESTORATION REPORT: We've Got Mazel**

The restoration of our first zodiac sign, or mazel, is finished, and scaffolding in the main sanctuary has been moved to the eastern side of the room. The Hebrew word "mazel" means star or constellation, hence our use of "lucky" or "good star," as in mazel tov. Mazelos are a venerable tradition in Jewish synagogue art, dating back to the 4th century CE. Zodiac floor mosaics have been found in a number of ancient synagogues, including in Israel, each zodiac sign associated with a Jewish month.

In Poland, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, mazelos were a typical part of synagogue decorative art, painted onto walls and ceilings. Consistent with religious views of the time, animals were depicted as docile in nature and minimum of human representation was allowed—a hand pulling a bow, for example. Only two shuls with mazelos remain on the Lower East Side: Stanton Street and Bialystocker, whose mazelos were restored in the 1990s.

With the destruction of Europe's synagogues, a once common Ashkenazic synagogue motif is now a very rare form of folk art that connects us to the world and beliefs of Eastern European Jews. As a result, Stanton Street has become the somewhat accidental steward of this precious legacy. This stewardship is in keeping with our Shul's mission to foster connections among the various generations. Our founders, who came from the small Galitzian town of Brezjan, brought with them a notion of proper shul religious decoration. The dating from the paint chips is consistent with the sense that this is art the immigrants painted in order to make their Shul feel more like home.

The mazelos are now being restored with the help of an anonymous grant that will cover the basic conservation and some of the restoration. Elul (the betullah, or Virgo) now has her sheaf of wheat firmly grasped in a hand showing typical Eastern European embroidery on its cuff. Several mazelos on the western wall have been seriously damaged by water seepage.

Architect Miriam Waltz and designer Molly Yestadt are serving as liasons with the congregation and the conservators, a team headed by individuals who also work at the Metropolitan Museum. You can follow the conservators' blog at [stantonstreet.blogspot.com](http://stantonstreet.blogspot.com) or on our website.

We need help to complete the project. The medallions (zodiac signs) are being restored, but nearby columns and tracings are not covered by our funding. One option is for artists connected with the Shul to repaint these areas. Shul artists can hopefully provide input as to what should be done with the wall below the zodiac and the stencil border. If you're interested in helping, please contact Miriam or Molly. They are also interested in soliciting input about grants and other funding.

--Elissa Sampson Boyarin



*Rabbi Chalaftha the son of Dosa of the village of Chanania would say: Ten who sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them, as is stated: 'The Almighty stands in the congregation of G-d.' (Ethics of our Fathers 3:6)*

Dear Friends,

There's a buzz in the air at the Stanton Street Shul; the energy is palpable. The year so far has been exciting, starting with High Holiday services, women's Torah readings, and many yartzeits commemorated at morning minyan as well as births, birthday celebrations, sheva brachot and anniversaries.

Our pre-holiday wine sale generated support for the shul, and we have shared communal dinners and hot kiddushim. We have benefited from inspiring sermons and speakers and have learned a great deal from Rabbi Yuter and his weekly shiurim. Building improvements are underway, both by a strong team of conservators and our estimable volunteers. Up ahead: Chanukah programs, volunteer days, movie night, tours by the LES Jewish Conservancy, women's Torah readings, luncheons and concerts.

Without your presence and your financial support, our community would cease to exist. Please consider making a generous year-end tax deductible donation to the Stanton Street Shul on our website ([www.stantonstshul.com](http://www.stantonstshul.com)) or by mail (P.O. Box 1008, NY NY 10002).

This has been a difficult year financially for some of us; the shul in turn has been affected. Our funds are depleted, and we turn to you for support. **We need your help now in order to continue to provide the programs and learning that have become a hallmark of our community, and to maintain our historic part of the Lower East Side as a vibrant Jewish community.**

We look forward to sharing all the good things in store.

Sincerely,

The Stanton Street Shul Board of Trustees

P.S. Please check out our website ([www.stantonstshul.com](http://www.stantonstshul.com)) for event info and weekly updates.

**President** Benny Sauerhaft **Co-Vice Presidents** Jessica Loeser, Malka Percal **Treasurer** Neal Picker  
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