

**WHERE WE OPEN OUR DOORS**

Judaism, first & foremost, a religion.	1
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**A PEOPLE, A LAND, BUT FIRST—  
JUDAISM IS, WILL BE A RELIGION**

The most important element in Judaism is religion.

The Jewish people are a people practising that religion. There can't be a Jewish people without the religion. Any group claiming to be that is a one-generation half-way house out of Judaism.

There can't be a Jewish land without the religion. But there has been a Jewish religion without the land. We all may hope that both will exist. .

Without Judaism, there would have been no Christianity, no Islam. These are not siblings, but a subsequent development—mutants latched onto the base. Judaism has to insist on its primacy. The others can claim Abraham for their own, but not on an equal or as historic a footing. Without Judaism there would be no tale of Abraham for others to adapt.

The great challenge for both Christianity and Islam is to accept they live in a pluralistic world of many beliefs. Much of Christianity now recognizes that. Much of Islam does not. People who say their religion supersedes Judaism, and therefore is alone

valid, are not friends of Judaism. It's Jews' folly to think they are.

The great challenge for Judaism, too, is to accept that in today's pluralistic globalism, there is in some places and can be in others an open religious marketplace, and Judaism needs to unbar its own doors and proclaim its own rights. That Judaism does not trumpet an exclusive salvation is one of its great virtues. But it is suicide, for Judaism not to welcome those who would want to learn about it and enter its ranks.

What does this mean for the synagogue?

Synagogues can not take their members for granted. In an open marketplace such as the U.S. synagogues can not keep their doors closed and their members in. They can not assume they will exist just because they have existed.

Judaism needs to reach out to the world, for its sake, its present members' sake, and its future members' sake.

The National Center to Encourage Judaism will help you reach out, by helping you with advertising your openness in the secular media.

For grant applications, see page seven.

You can put on a Taste of Judaism, Basic Judaism, or Introduction to Judaism-type course, advertise it in the general (not Jewish) media, fill out the application, enclose a copy of the specific billing and the ad, send it to us, and wait a few weeks. Couldn't be more simple. You can make use of the grant in preparing for your next such program.

*Jews are all over! Look at these places!*  
Outreach in the U.S. and Canada:

**NH SYNAGOGUE OF 90 TRIES TASTE**

Derry, NH—Two Sunday ads for its first Taste of Judaism minicourse drew “fabulous interest,” says coordinator Susan Keller.

Etz Hayim Synagogue (R), with 90 members, attracted 15 to the class, 14 of them not members, 1/3 of these not Jewish.

**NJ BASICS PULLS 2/3 NONMEMBERS**

Cinnaminson, NJ—Temple Sinai (C) puts on the 5-lesson Basic Judaism course from the National Jewish Outreach Program and attracts 22 nonmembers of the 32 attending. 7 are not Jewish.

Esther Bliss, Adult Ed Chair, gauges the response “very good considering we are a small synagogue on the fringe of the larger South Jersey Jewish community in Cherry Hill.”

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## **MONROEVILLE, NY, TRIES INTRO**

Monroeville, NY--Temple Beth-El—the Monroeville Temple of Liberal Judaism—registers 23 students for a 16-week Introduction to Judaism. 8 of the 10 non-Jews are interested in converting, and 5 of them were meeting with the rabbi or cantor.

The temple had 6 conversions in 2001.

Rabbi Garry Loeb comments on “a very interesting mix! Most congenial & good interaction—friendships forming.”

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## **NC TRIANGLE BLENDING NEARS 100**

Raleigh, NC—The Triangle Board of Rabbis continues its successful consortium, in offering an Introduction to Judaism course at 2 sites that pulls almost 100 people. The 10-week class in 2002 attracted 92 people, 66 of them not Jewish. All branches of Judaism participated--the classes liked the diversity of rabbis from all congregations, we're told. Spring classes followed at most synagogues.

Rabbi Lucy Dinner (919-781-4697) reports some 20 people were converted at area synagogues in the past year.

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## **PITT AREA TEMPLE HOLDS TASTE**

Monroeville, PA—Of the 9 people attending the Taste class of Temple David (R), 7 are not Jewish.

The temple in the preceding year witnessed the conversion of 4 adults and 3 children, reports Rabbi Richard Rheins.

Of the class, he comments: “This program is only for the unaffiliated. But from the publicity and enthusiasm it generated I am now conducting an ‘inreach’ program for Temple members (many of whom are interfaith.)”

He holds a Basic Judaism program for adults every Sunday from 9 to 10 a.m.

“This is our second time using Taste of Judaism. It has truly helped membership and continuing education.”

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## **READING AREA HAS NUNS TO TASTE**

Wyomissing Hills, PA—Reform Cong. Oheb Shalom gets a turnout of 78 to its Taste course, for which it charges \$5. Of these, 62 are not Jewish.

While the class is based on the UAHC program, Rabbi Michelson personalized it to make it workable in a larger group setting.

Attendance included four nuns from an area convent, and five people from a Federated church. Majority of attendees said they wanted a better understanding of Judaism. Nine had Jewish roots and wanted to get back to their faith.

Most people learned of the program from ads in the Reading Eagle.

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## **FIRST TASTE IN CHARLESTON, S.C.**

Charleston, SC—Cong. Beth Elohim (R) holds its first Taste class, and finds 21 of the 28 attending are not Jewish. Three are interested in converting.

Among comments:

“Very drawn to the concepts and values.”

“Great information presented in an organized way. Covered a lot of ground and answered many questions.”

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## **INTRO CLASS IN MISSOURI CITY, TX**

Missouri City, TX—Cong. Beth El (R) holds a 14-week Introduction class, attended by 8, 3 of them not Jewish. It had 4 conversions in 2002.

All ads say “Everyone welcome,” reports Yaffa Steubinger, adult ed chair.

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## **SEATTLE TASTE IS COFFEE-PLUS**

Seattle—Temple De Hirsch Sinai (R) had 92 people attending its Taste of Judaism class. 9/10 were not members; ¾ were not Jewish.

Ken Schlegel, member services director, says 65% were interested in converting. The temple had 12 conversions in the preceding year, he reports.

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## **ADVERTISING CREDITED WITH GAIN**

Los Altos Hills, CA—Rabbi Charles Briskin credits the success of the Taste program at Cong. Beth Am (R) “to a solid advertising campaign in the two local papers and the regional San Jose Mercury News.”

Attendance was 39 of whom 2/3—27—were not Jewish. Six were considering conversion. All students were nonmembers.

The temple had about a dozen conversions the preceding year.

Among comments:

“I have always felt a strong affinity for the Jewish religion. I have always felt a part of the struggles of the Jewish people.”

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## **ADVERTISING HELPS: U OF JUDAISM**

Los Angeles—The Introduction to Judaism enrollment “in the outlying areas of Los Angeles is growing,” says a University of Judaism program assistant.

“This growth, we believe, is directly related to the grant money we receive which allows us to do extra advertising.”

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## **SAN DIEGO DOES TASTE I AND II**

San Diego—United Jewish Federation here sponsors both parts of the Taste course—I, on Jewish spirituality, community and ethics; II, on Jewish customs, life-cycles, holidays and traditions.

Students number 165, reports outreach coordinator Vivian Lampell Olmos, of whom 46% were not Jewish.

In addition to those in an interfaith relationship, or married to a Jew, “There are many people who are curious about the Jewish religion and see this free class as a wonderful opportunity to learn about a religion they wish to explore. We also see a significant number of students who are Jews by birth but know nothing about their religion, or wish to reconnect with their roots. Many of the students who complete this course ask for guidance in finding additional courses on Judaism or contact the synagogues directly for more education or conversion.”

## Among comments:

“This class provided me with the knowledge I needed to make the decision to pursue my conversion to Judaism.”

The UJF has a quarterly Chai Times publication which lists educational opportunities and is distributed free to all the unaffiliated families in the community.

It also distributes a Shalom Book, with information about the community.

What would also be useful, Ms Olmos says, is “a very basic booklet with basic concepts of Judaism.”

Having seen a Proclaimer report on a Florida class in Spanish, she indicates interest, “since we have a large Spanish speaking population in San Diego.”

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## **SANTA MONICA WINS THIRD GRANT**

Santa Monica, CA—Beth Shir Shalom (R) wins its third NCEJ advertising grant for its Introduction to Judaism program. The 19-week course, with a fee of \$175-225, drew 20 people, 16 of them non-members, and 5 not Jewish. The synagogue had 10 conversions in the preceding year, reports executive director Bill Concoff.

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## **WHITTIER ALSO REPEAT NCEJ WIN**

Whittier, CA—Another repeat winner of an NCEJ grant is Temple Beth Shalom (C). Administrator Alita Sevin reports 12 attended its 18-week Introduction course, ¾ of them not Jewish. The synagogue had 3 conversions in the preceding year.

Ms Sevin comments, “With changing demographics, outreach is an important procedure, and inclusion is vital.”

About the class she notes, “We had several members of our congregation participate this time around and they contributed greatly to the class and were extremely helpful to the new enrollees. Of those taking the class we have already had one conversion and at least 4 others are working toward that end—at their own pace. All of the members of the class are attending services and have become involved in volunteer work at the Synagogue. We feel very fortunate to again have reached such a fine group of people.”

The V-P of Membership “holds a Shabbat dinner at her home most Fridays before services and works hard to maintain a balance of new members, non-Jews, members and those seeking community,” Ms Sevin adds.

**“Our Rabbi makes telephone and email contact with members, new members, prospects and**

former members each week, inviting them to special events at Beth Shalom as well as to his own home.

"We are offering an Adult Hebrew Reading Class which will help members, new members and prospective converts become more familiar and comfortable with the liturgy and services. We also have an ongoing class taught by our Rabbi twice a month on the liturgy. All are welcome to attend.

"We have formed a social group for members, nonmembers, interfaith couples and non-Jewish singles, Jewish couples and singles alike. This group of varying numbers meets at least once a month to make sure that everyone has a social as well as spiritual bond with Beth Shalom."

In January the synagogue held its second annual shabbaton, open to anyone in the community.

It began with a kosher meal for 40 at 6 p.m. Friday, with the Rabbi and Cantor leading the participants through the ritual from candle lighting to grace after meals. "For many of the attendees, this was a first time experience, and for our older members who live alone, it was an opportunity to celebrate the Shabbat with community. All rituals were explained and there was much singing and gaiety."

Instead of the usual 25 for Friday night there were nearer 60, about 1/3 non-Jewish non-members. Ritual, tradition and liturgy were explained, something not usually done at regular services.

Saturday there was a continental breakfast and Torah study, with about 15, and 22 attending the service, including all the Intro class. This was followed by Israeli dancing, lunch and panel discussions, one with several rabbis of different Jewish denominations, and one with several Jews by Choice. Day ended with a havdallah service. Books, flyers and pamphlets were available during the entire Shabbaton.

Ms Sevin advises, for any large gathering, "allow plenty of time for planning, have a good (and large) committee to take care of the various steps"—and be prepared for the unexpected. (562-941-8744; bethshalom6@aol.com.)

## **MISSISSAUGA SPELLS SHABBAT**

Mississauga, Ontario—Solel Cong. here holds another Shabbat Across Canada, the NJOP-sponsored event, and again wins an NCEJ advertising grant. About 95 attended, about 1/5 of them not Jewish.

A teaching dinner preceded the service, at \$20/adult and \$7/child.

## **WHY SMALLER TURNOUT IN BOISE?**

Boise, ID—Why does Taste draw a smaller turnout than usual for Cong. Ahavath Beth Israel (R)?

Outreach persons Harriet & Gene Bodesheim think it might be because of "the war and anti-Jewish feelings." The temple charged \$15 for the 3 classes, and asked for a note on why one was interested.

The synagogue had 10 attending, 9 of them not Jewish, and only one this time wanting a follow-up. It had 5 conversions in the preceding year.

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## **NORTHEAST REFORM GETS IN TASTE**

Needham, MA—As the Reform movement's regional outreach coordinator system shrinks to only those funded by member synagogues, the Northeast Council wins another advertising grant from NCEJ, for its Taste of Judaism class.

During the second half of 2002-3 program year, the region held 6 classes with 158 participants, including two classes in Russian for New Americans, reports Joyce Schwartz, coordinator.

About 15% of Taste graduates go on to other classes. About 10% of non-Jewish graduates start on the path to synagogue affiliation, conversion, and an active commitment to Jewish life.

More than 70% of participants learn about Taste from secular newspaper advertisements, Ms Schwartz notes. "We receive additional publicity when Taste is a featured story in local newspapers."

### Among comments:

"I am considering conversion. After taking Taste I feel better prepared to start the next course, Intro to Judaism," says a 47-year-old single woman.

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## **PLYMOUTH LANDS NCEJ GRANT**

Plymouth, MA—A first-time NCEJ advertising grant goes to Cong. Beth Jacob (R) for its Taste program. 28 students attend, 16 of them not Jewish. The synagogue had 2 conversions in the preceding year.

"Very pleased with the response from ads," says volunteer administrator Barbara Aharon.

The synagogue also takes part in NJOP's Shabbat Across America. About 72 people attended, only 6 of them not members.

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## **ANN ARBOR BRINGS GRANT TO PORT**

Ann Arbor, MI—Another entrant to NCEJ grantee ranks is Temple Beth Emeth (R) with its Taste minicourse. Of its 14 students 9 were not Jewish.

The synagogue had 12 conversions in the preceding year, reports program director Andrew Goodman.

The synagogue was to hold a similar class this spring, focusing more on the basics of practice. Participants felt this topic had not been addressed enough in the first sessions. It was also planning a basics of Passover service for intermarrieds and those with Jewish family and friends who don't know anything about the holiday. The Taste class showed a lot of interest in this topic, Goodman says.

Of the Taste class itself, he notes: "My one issue is that the synagogue can be an intimidating place to go if one is a non-Jew and is interested in just learning a little. In the future we might hold classes off-site in order to make the location less oppressive for people who are wary about their studying Judaism."

Comment: This suggests that part of the immediate, initial indoctrination could be a tour of the premises. We've seen how fascinated non-Jews can be when they view the open Torah, for instance. An explanation of the bima, the eternal light, the Torah, the menorah, etc., might defuse some of the wariness.

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## CONVERSION: POLISH ACTIVITY

*(From Gazeta, American Ass'n for Polish-Jewish Studies 2/03):*

A retired Conservative rabbi from Philadelphia, Ivan Caine, has moved to Poland to service the Jewish congregation in Wroclaw. With two other rabbis, he performed 19 conversions in Wroclaw. Some were individuals who discovered they had a Jewish parent or grandparent; others were simply attracted to the faith itself.

Conservative Rabbi Ron Hoffberger has similarly performed 18 conversions in Prague.

Orthodox Rabbis Michael Schudrich in Warsaw and Sasha Pecaric in Krakow have been unaccepting of the Conservative conversions; they have questioned the dedication of the converts, and barred them from using the Orthodox mikvahs.

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## WHY YOU NEED TO LET PEOPLE KNOW THE DOORS ARE OPEN

*(From ShalomBayitForUs listserv):* Stephen, 38, Nashville: "Born a Christian, I have found I have more and more problems with this faith and have begun thinking of turning toward Judaism...I know quite a few Jewish folk and this is largely why I've been shy about approaching the synagogues thus far. It's like I'm afraid they'll laugh."

Donna, 50, near Charleston, SC, who converted last summer: "My best advice to you right now is go to the synagogue! Get to know the people, the rabbi, the service and go from there. ..Once I had the courage to go, I knew I was doing the right thing."

Stephen: "As to going to synagogue believe it or not it never occurred to me that I might be able to go. I guess I assumed that it was not allowed. But I hope to go this Friday now that you've put the idea in my head."

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