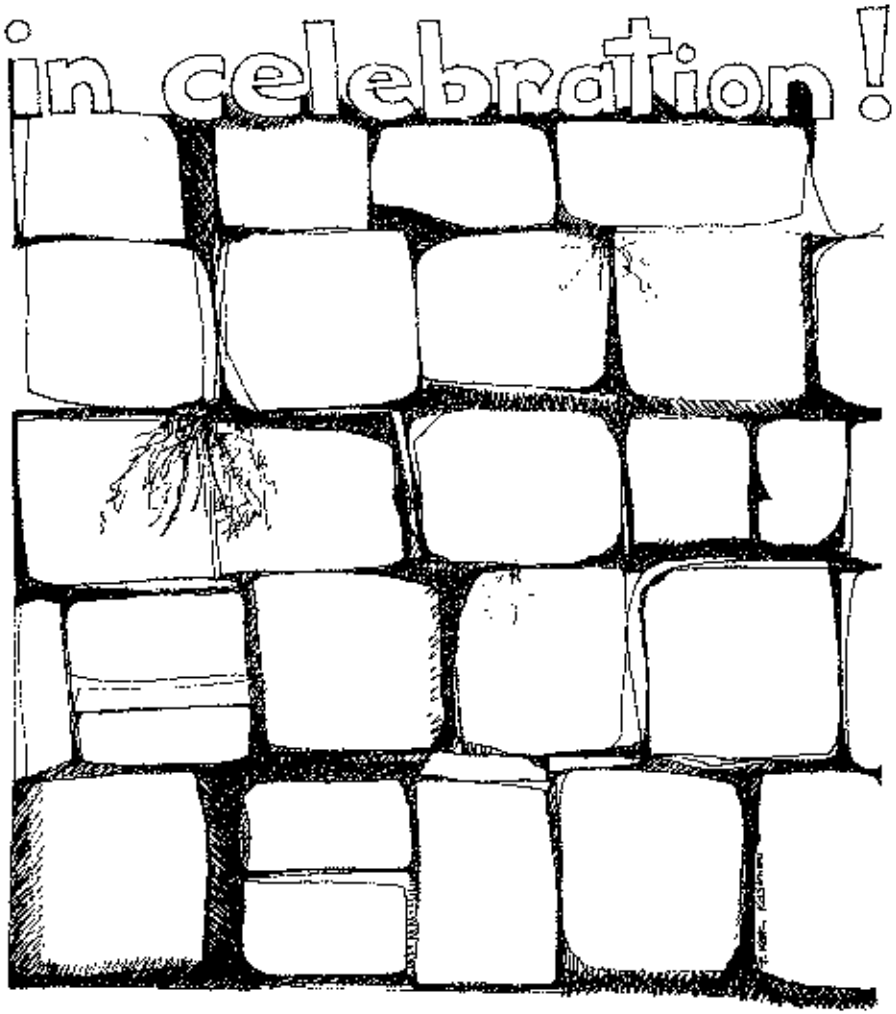
Congregation Havurah
6320 Main Street • Williamsville, NY 14221

Congregation Havurah:

the first twenty-five years
1972 - 1997



by Tom Nusbaum

What is Congregation Havurah?

"It's a group of people who care."
That's what I felt when you were all so supportive during the loss of my Dad. The services you performed and your condolences will long be remembered.

—Tom Nusbaum

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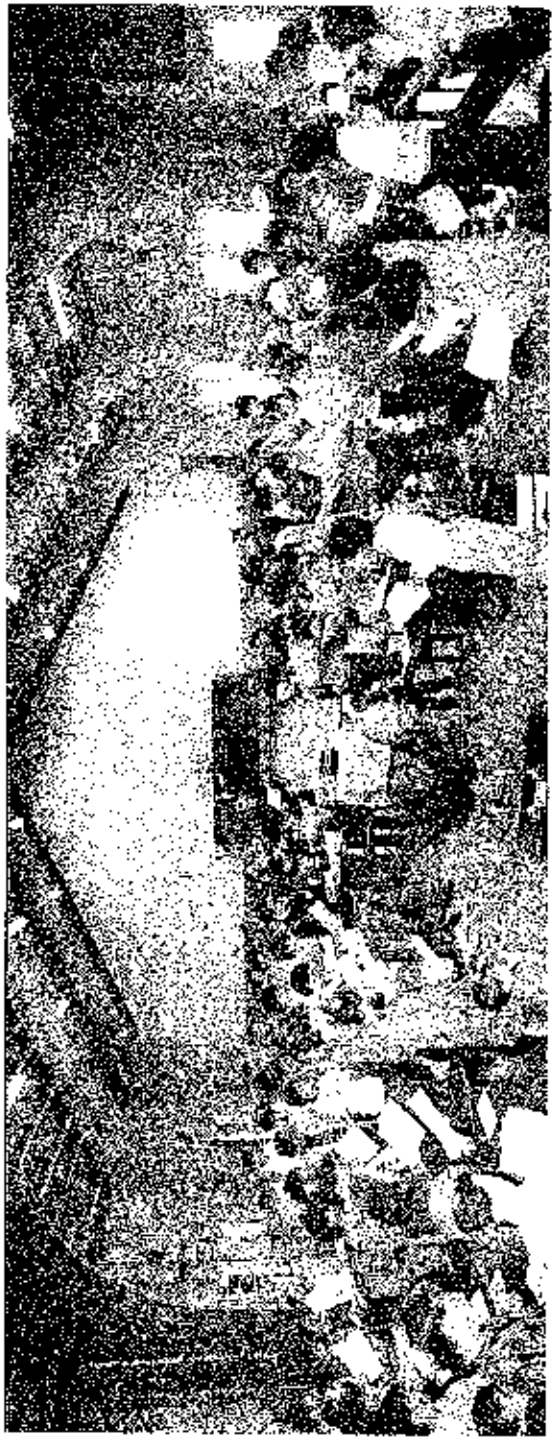
This history of Congregation Havurah was written by
Tom Nusbaum
and read at the Rosh Hashanah Retreat of 1998

Produced and Edited by Arny Alt and Len Katz
Cover illustration by Terri Katz-Kasimov



Preface

To commemorate Congregation Havurah's 25th Anniversary in 1997, the Congregation commissioned a brief history that tells the story of its founding and evolution, with an emphasis on Havurah's beginning stages. Source material for this project included questionaires distributed to a cross-section of members; interviews conducted with several key individuals; and the Havurah "archives" which include newspaper clippings, *Havurah Hotlines* and a collection of photographs.

In collecting material for this project and, especially, in reading responses to the questionaires, the author was struck by the use of the word "we", and the corresponding lack of reference to "I", "me" and "my", as the story of Havurah unfolded. This usage reflects a dedication to community among Havurim that reaches beyond any single person. In an attempt to capture the unique spirit of Havurah, this history is written in the first person plural—*WE*. In addition, wherever possible, the account is told in members' own words, edited for clarity and continuity.

Despite the absence of individual recognition in this document, we honor the commitment of the founding families whose names are listed below:

Sid and Lee Anthone
Bill and Vivian Bank
Don and Judy Davis
Arnold and Marcia Freedman
Dick and Kathy Gordon
Len and Judy Katz
Joel and Fern Levin
Bruce Lippman and Anne Judelson-Lippman
Sandy and Sue Nusbaum
Sandy and Lois Satuloff
Bill and Lenore Schiller
Gary and Barbara Schuller
Roger and Joan Simon
Mickey and Nadine Stein

In addition, Congregation Havurah dedicates this publication to the memory of our beloved members who have passed away:

Nancy Alcabes
Buddy Block
Felix Brown
Renee Edelman
Betty Ann Haniford
Joan Levine
Sandy Nusbaum
Lois Satuloff
Sandy Satuloff
Bill Schiller
Ted Schulman
Joanie Stopper

The Beginning

Seated in the hard-backed pews of the Synagogue, we had questions about the role of Judaism in our lives. *How could we create a more authentic religious experience? How should we connect with tradition and ritual? How would Judaism find expression in our lives and the lives of our children?*

For some of us, regular religious practice was a new experience that raised these questions for the first time. For others, the questions were rooted in our repeated encounters with an institutional Jewish experience that too often seemed impersonal and pre-packaged, devoid of real meaning. But for all of us about to join together in a show of "conscientious objection" to the status quo of our religious lives, the difficult questions—and the search for their answers—became unavoidable in the autumn of 1971.

Seated in the pews, amid the stained-glass elegance of Buffalo's Temple Beth Zion, we watched a young rabbi walk across the stage and begin to speak. We already knew Ron Goldstein and we liked him a great deal. Beth Zion's Associate Rabbi had just returned from the State Prison at Attica where, for two days, he had stood vigil as negotiations crept forward inside the prison walls. He returned to Buffalo to prepare for the High Holy Days and, as the Attica story unfolded, he witnessed a reaction from a portion of the Jewish community which jarred him.

"I was hearing awful things," Ron Goldstein recalls. "About the prisoners. I was hearing fellow Jews say: 'Shoot them. Kill them.' I was horrified. It was so un-Jewish. One thing Jews don't do is solve problems by killing."

And so at Rosh Hashanah, Ron Goldstein stood at the podium and registered his alarm. He spoke to us about Attica. About a Judaism that teaches truth and compassion. About making religion meaningful and personal. About becoming more than Jews by name alone.

Judaism had lost its pertinence to our lives. We wanted to feel more personally connected with our religion. For those of us at Beth Zion, we were observers. We sat down as if we were at a show; we watched *them* perform. Everything was rote, devoid of originality. We arrived, we were handed the *Union Prayer Book*, we went through the motions and then we headed home.

We were dismayed by the leadership's opposition to change. At that time in Buffalo, Beth Zion assumed the voice of the Jewish Community and we were being fed bland sermons during a period of social and international conflict that begged for stronger commentary. We wanted our temple to take a stand on the issues, right or wrong. But the Senior Rabbi was unwilling to speak out —unwilling, as we saw it, to offend his complacent flock.

We were further dismayed by Beth Zion's policy of replacing the Associate Rabbi every few years. For many of us, Ron Goldstein was the reason we were actively involved at the Temple. And although the Senior Rabbi was a man who touched many lives and had cultivated a loyal following, we were dissatisfied by the probibility that the congregation might never select a long term leader to whom we related philosophically and politically.

Judaism said we needed to be truthful, to be people of integrity. Judaism taught us that we had to come clean. We wanted Judaism to have something to say about the issues that mattered to us.

"We saw the Vietnam War as something false," Ron Goldstein recalls. " Thousands and thousands of deaths were bad enough, but when it appeared that it was happening for reasons that were less than true, well, that was a conflict for us." It had to do with integrity. There was a rub between those of us who felt that way and an establishment that seemed to say, *We are always right.*

"I became your spokesman, but the fact that you were members and I was the Rabbi really didn't matter. Because my job was to talk, I merely helped crystallize what you may have been thinking."

Although the Beth Zion leadership never attempted to censor Ron, a philosophical distance grew between he and the Senior Rabbi. Ron decided to move on.

The Decision

We started small—just six families—but before long we numbered 14 couples at our Monday night meetings. The original sessions were held to vent our frustration with Beth Zion for not understanding our need to have a younger rabbi on a permanent basis. Many of us hoped these meetings would lead to discussions with the Beth Zion Board. But out of the internal synagogue politics that were brewing at the time, something else began to take root that suprised us all. Each Monday night, we would end the meetings this way: "If anybody wants to come back, we'll get together next week." Lo and behold, everybody kept coming back.

Something extraordinary was going on.

Over several months, we evolved in a complicated manner. We came with different agendas anddifferent backgrounds relating to Judaism. At first, we never thought about religious philosophy, about money, a building, a rabbi. We simply spoke about sticking together and trying to work something out.

Some of us were not looking for change in philosophy or ritual, but rather to be part of a congregation that would address social issues, a congregation that would be proactive in the Jewish Community and the community at large. But many of us wanted to reintroduce religion into our lives. We wanted to put religion in the context of a community.

Soon we were contemplating more than weekly discussions. From the second or third meeting, our conversations drifted to the possibility of forming a separate group either within another temple or by ourselves. Ron Goldstein provided advice, and although we lacked the resources to hire him, we resolved to move forward.

> "If you want to do this," Ron told us that spring, "do it regardless of me. In my remaining time here, I'll be glad to help, but I want you to do it for yourselves. You should *not* be starting a congregation out of rebellion or anger. That is something that cannot last."

We asked Ron to talk to us about the concept of Reform Judaism. We read Alvin Reines' paper on polydoxy—a system of beliefs tolerant of widely varying viewpoints. A passage from Milton Steinberg's *Basic Judaism* seemed to speak to our departure from Beth Zion: "Liberty leads to diversity," he wrote. "Being free entities, congregations run the widest range of viewpoints and ritual modes."

Steinberg, of course, was speaking about the autonomy inherent in Jewish practice and the spectum of religious expression represented by the labels "Orthodox", "Conservative" and "Reform". We identified most with the latter which embodied, in the author's words, "left modernism".

> Here the weight of the Tradition is least, the influence of contemporary thought and circumstance greatest. In consequence, Reform worship is furthest removed from the historic pattern. It uses the English language in the main. Of the old rituals it retains only those it judges to be meaningful and congenial to the modern temper.

But our meeting agendas went beyond our core principles. If we were to become a congregation we needed a name, trustees and officers. Would we buy a building? Would we affiliate with a larger body? When we gave up an institutional framework as we had by leaving Beth Zion, when suddenly possessed by an unaccustomed freedom, our independence became a scary prospect. We realized that we could not afford to hire a rabbi or purchase a building. We had no real experience leading the practice of Judaism. All we really seemed to possess was energy, desire and a donated mimeograph machine.

We consulted with, and were encouraged by, Rabbi David Hachen, the Regional Director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). Our Ritual and Observance Committee contemplated how we might accommodate weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, funerals and memorial services.

On a warm evening in July, 1972, we finally called for a vote. With the High Holy Days looming and the deadline for paying dues at Beth Zion drawing near, it came down to a fateful meeting of 20 people in a small livingroom where a single question hung in the air: *Should we do it?*

The vote was 19 to one in favor of going forward. The lone dissenter said, "You must be crazy." He wondered aloud, "What do we know about running a temple?" He was anticipating that if we decided to go forward, he would be smack in the middle of the action. In the end, he did not oppose the majority. In the end, he became our first president.

The Name

One minute we were sitting around a living room and the next we were a *Congregation.* We decided that night that we would be in business by Rosh Hashanah and that we would not be committed to buying or building a facility. We were to be a Reform Congregation, but all points of view would be accepted and respected. We would apply to the UAHC for recognition as a Reform Synagogue. We allowed that our experiment would last only as long as it was relevant. We weren't trying for permanence. If it lost its usefulness—fine, there were other things to do. Few of us thought the Congregation would last beyond a year or two.

As for our name, we considered several possibilities: finalists included "Beth Shalom", "Beth Solel" (meaning pathfinder) and "Beth Nachshom" after the first Hebrew to walk into the parted Red Sea. In the end, we selected "Congregation Havurah".

The word "congregation" in organized religion implies professionally governed body not limited by size, while "havurah" is typically a small group reliant on membership to conduct activities. Our name, we later learned, was a contradiction that foreshadowed an identity crisis—an eventual confontation with the issues of size and structure. We would soon begin asking, "Are we a *congregation,* or are we a *havurah?*" But in those formative days, we were still wrestling with a more basic question: *What was our relationship to Judaism?*

Looking back at that period, Len Katz wrote in the journal *Sh'ma,*

We announced to ourselves our own ignorance and we wanted to learn. We recognized the failings of our Jewish upbringing, our Jewish education and past congregational affiliations. We wanted more! We rejected the role of passive participants or observers in religous services. We felt the need for closeness and "family" that seemed a natural part of religious expression. We especially wanted our children to be legitimate participants in religious observances. We wanted Judaism to become more a part of our daily lives.

The concensus on our name was made without knowing of similar groups, such as Chavurah Shalom in Boston and the New York Chavurah. (Today, Havurahs abound in the United States and abroad, although unlike ours, most are affiliated with a larger institution.) We were so much at the beginning of a "movement" that we didn't know there was a movement.

In our desire to touch Judaism personally, to reach a deeper level of feeling, we consulted Jewish leaders about ritual. We wanted to include tradition that was meaningful and reject what was not. We came to understand that Judaism can speak to us directly, unencumbered by political structure, dogma or limitations imposed by "establishment" directives.

We had the tenacity and determination to offer our members a space in which we could examine and even challenge our beliefs. Our "community" was marked by the acceptance of individual differences, a respect for each other's views.

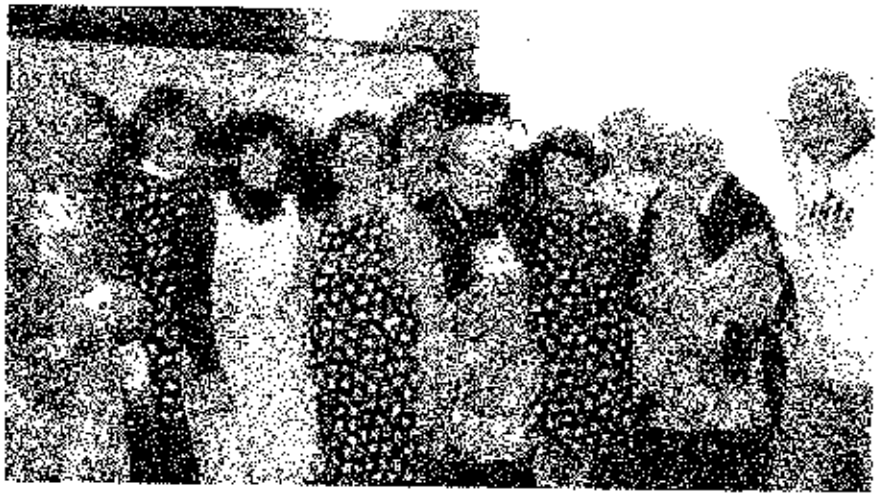
Havurah aspired to a vibrant, creative, questioning practice of Judaism. We asked, "What is Jewish to each of us?" Our answers could be shared: an exchange of ideas and expeciences without judgment or explanation. We ranged from orthodoxy to humanism to, perhaps, atheism. Recognizing that there is no *one* Judaism, we were committed to the idea of Polydoxy, a spirit of tolerance.

Our Principles

Our Guiding principles at the time were as follows:

- The principle of ultimate freedom of thought; the acceptance of and respect for all religious beliefs within the group as a rightful part of Reform Judaism.
- A strong emphasis on family participation in congregational activities.
- A dynamic, honest, searching religious climate in education in which spiritual meaning is sought by young and old together.
- The application of ethical principles to the search for solutions to problems of human injustices.

- The study of our relationship to Israel.
- The selection of rituals, traditions and customs which, through study, we find meaningful.
- The importance of the community experience as an integral part of our evolving spiritual life.
- A group size which will insure meaningful participation of each member and maintain a sense of intimacy and personal involvement.



As we were in the process of becoming, we discovered that a powerful sense of community had emerged among us. We began to trust each other. Ideas could be safely exchanged. And, of equal importance, feelings could be revealed.

The People

To ask, *What is Havurah?* is to ask, *Who is Havurah?* We were rubber stamps of each other. We were young. Our children were young. For the most part, we had not yet been touched by death or divorce. • We were men with long sideburns and striped shirts; women with *That Girl* hairdos and plaid pants. • We were families crowding into suburban livingrooms for meetings or side-by-side, digging in the soil as we planted 1,200 trees at Camp Lakeland. • We were young parents seated in folding lawn chairs, our children circling us and crashing into picnic baskets. • We were earnest and thoughtful and curious as we learned to write our own services. • We were a mother in a long, red dress watching her son's Bar Mitzvah (Havurah's first!) at the Westwood Country Club. • We were Sunday School carpools racing home in time for the Buffalo Bills kickoff. • We were kids on a visit to Manhattan, climbing the Statue of Liberty or waiting, exhausted, on a Lower East

Side street corner with duffels and sleeping bags. • We were a congregation on retreat: holding hands as we prayed by the water's edge; singing beside a campfire; playing soccer or football; sitting in a common room on an Autumn morning, discussing Israel.

We were the *Havurah Hotline*, first published in the Fall of 1972. It was a primitive reproduction in purple type, containing a calendar of events, messages from our first student rabbi, our treasurer and our school chairperson. It contained a list of committee chairs and donations to the Havurah Fund. The *Hotline* was mailed with an eight-cent Dwight D. Eisenhower stamp. A subsequent edition reprinted thank-you notes which acknowledged welcoming gifts such as a bunting bag, an umbrella and a plant. Another promoted a "Jewish Experience Workshop . . . similar to an encounter session, with each person searching deeply within yourself to discover your feelings about your Jewishness."

The Sixties were over—just barely. "You can believe in your own thing," we told a newspaper reporter at the time, "and you can write exactly what you believe into the service." We remained politically active, a reflection of the times and our beliefs. A *Hotline* message of March, 1973, begins, "Now that the war in Vietnam is coming to an end and our soldiers are returning home . . . one of the issues that continues to split our nation is that of amnesty." That same year we were troubled by the deaths of two American Indian Movement supporters at the hands of federal agents in South Dakota. As important as it was to light the Sabbath candles, the world's events were bringing out our religious feelings, too.

More Decisions

In the beginning, we were greatly concerned about our inability to support a rabbi. Based on our prior experience, we were convinced that a temple required a religious figurehead. So we enlisted the help of Bennett Miller, a 25-year-old from Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College. He played guitar and sang but most of all he understood and helped shape us. To our surprise and joy, we helped shape him, too.

Bennett was the first of four enthusiastic and talented student rabbis to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. He was followed by Louis Rieser, Karen Fox and David Alexander.

We later benifited from the leadership and expertise of two ordained rabbis, Alan Podet and Paul Golumb, who provided part-time rabbinic services. Neither our student nor our professional rabbis stood behind a podium and directed services. We *all* composed services. We *all* participated. By developing our own talents for leading the Congregation, we eventually discovered that a trained rabbi was not a Judaic essential. We came to understand Steinberg's assertion that:

In [Judaism's] eyes no difference exists, except in training between the man at the pulpit and those in the pews. Nor is there any right at all which only the former can properly perform. Any layperson who has the knowledge and the spiritual fitness may conduct worship and, if s/he has something to say and can get the congregation to listen, may preach.

Another of our feared "deficiencies"—lack of a building—turned out to be a major advantage. We joked that, like our ancestors who crossed the Sinai, we could pull up our tent and move on. We came to realize that:

Whatever spot Jews set aside for their religious exercises, wherever they put up an Ark containing the Torah-scroll, source and symbol of the Tradition, there is a synagogue . . . [The synagogue functions as] a 'house of prayer', a 'house of study' and a 'house of the people'. . . A synagogue is not only a place but also the people who resort to it, that is to say, a congregation . . .

Without a building to manage and personnel to oversee, we were spared the burden and financial drain of owning our own building. For a quarter century, we have rented space at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Williamsville and our liberation from an "edifice complex" has had a huge impact on our ability to provide more programs and welcome people of all economic means. We never spent huge blocks of committee and board meeting time on items that weigh down other congregations. By not housing ourselves in an existing Jewish facility, we have kept out from under the auspices (and potential influence) of other organizations with a room for rent.

From the beginning, we never sold tickets to our services. Anybody could come. Our dues policy remains unique: One person is the trustee and nobody knows what others pay. People set their own dues based on a general range. If you have a problem, you go to the trustee and say, "Look, I can't handle it this year."

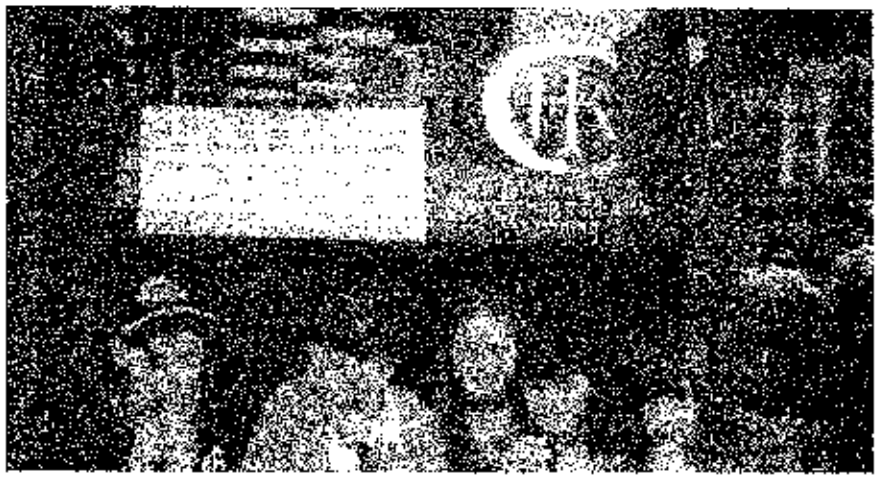
Although we do not actively solicit new members, we embraced those who found us and were willing to share our involvement. By the end of 1973 we had expanded to 29 families. By 1975, we consisted of 73 adults and 93 children representing 37 families. Author Bernard Reisman wrote about our struggle with growth:

The dilemma facing Congregation Chavurah (sic) at this point . . . is whether it is to remain a chavurah, in which relationships among participants are central and the momentum for activities rests in the hands of the member families; or whether it is to continue to grow in size and become a *congregation*, with increasing responsibility transferred to a cadre of professional staff who are required to service the families.

We periodically placed a cap on membership. We wanted to remain small for one simple reason: Every family, out of necessity, should be committed to our survival. Success required significant participation from members and, as a result, our commitment grew stronger. Our small size was, in fact, one of our greatest strengths.

Our Children

Our children's participation in Havurah would be on an equal footing with adults. Already, our kids had taken enthusiastically to alternative aspects of worship, such as Retreat. In our approach to their education, we echoed the poet Herbert Read's contention that "... the two essential secrets of moral education [are] intimacy and activity."



As kids ourselves, some of us endured the type of Hebrew School teachers who would crack our knuckles with a ruler. Havurah would not be like that. We sought a Jewish education for our children that was meaningful, a learning environment that would be experiential, an opportunity to investigate Judaism and discover, in whatever way possible, the personal connection it might hold.

Our Hebrew Schools were casual and small, held in member's homes. Our Sunday School at the downtown Jewish Center began with 43 children. In an early report, our Religious School Committee, which included a 14-year-old member, outlined our intention to "give our children a basic sense of Jewish identity, a knowledge of the Jewish historical past and Jewish traditions as they evolved through the ages, a sense of Jewish ethics and an ability to relate the precepts of Reform Judaism to today's living."

Later, we voted to reject the UAHC suggestion to deny children of interfaith marriages the opportunity to attend our Sunday School. We felt this decision was necessary for the continued participation of some of our members and for our future as a congregation.

Early on we had accepted study as the equivalent of prayer. Our adult education meetings took on issues of Reform Judaism and Israel, as well as American and international politics. We held discussion groups that addressed Judaism's complicated relationships with Arabs, African-Americans and Poles. After an initial period of introspection and religious experience through services and study, we began to look outside the group. In our sponsorship of Soviet and Vietnamese families, we helped them set up apartments, took them shopping, taught them to drive. We also collected food and delivered Thanksgiving turkeys for those in need. At Christmas, we volunteer in soup kitchens.

In those early days, our very existence was so novel and exhilarating, and the question of our survival so threatening, that feelings were intense. We had not anticipated the intensity of involvement with Judaism, the intensity of commitment with eachother and the significant place of Havurah in our lives. Perhaps none of us could have predicted how deeply we would feel about Havurah, how personal it was to become for us.

The idea that we were capable of providing ourselves and others with the Jewish component of our lives gave us strength and confidence. We felt involved and we were learning more about Judaism than ever before. We learned about the Reform Movement, about Humanism, about how a community can subordinate differences and disagreements. We learned songs and we learned there is much more to learn.

We were devoted to activities that would include the whole family regardless of age, with no differentiation made between the work, commitment or responsibilities of male or female members. We opened our doors to anyone who felt comfortable with us.

One of us recalls the feeling of finding a home at Havurah: "We joined . . .during the first official year. In typical Buffalo fashion a member's mother told my mother about this small group that was forming. We were invited to attend the Sukkot service and, when we did, we joined on the spot." Another member reflects:
It was a comfortable situation . . . It provided us with religious services which we were both looking for, yet, since one of us was Roman Catholic, we did not feel out of place because of the humanistic nature of the services . . . Havurah accepted us for who we were . . . and neither of us felt out of place. In searching for a place to be us, Havurah offered us friendship.

It was a friendship that intensified as we wrote services together, met in eachother's homes and helped educate eachother's children. We became family to one another in varying degrees because emotional as well as spiritual needs were being met. Our small size lent itself to an intimacy that you don't see in other congregations. If someone had a problem, an illness, a tragedy, everyone immediately rallied to their cause. And from that sense of community, we re-captured the joy of religion. We seemed to fit under those current Jewish movements which seek to discover what lies beyond the important issues of survival or standing up to oppression, which seek to discover that, inside our Judaism, we possess great joy.

The "Experiment"

At first outsiders winked at us. *The congregation that prayed in jeans.* We were viewed as mavericks, ill-fated and threatening. Some perceived us as rebels whose mutiny was superficial or carried out in anger. We were characterized as undirected and misguided. We were labeled *elitist, rich, intellectual renegades.* We were "hippie heretics" communing with nature in rural settings, meeting in places other than a synagogue, writing our own services and expounding on non-traditional themes. We were warned that Havurah would undermine the Buffalo Jewish Community. One of us was told, "Those people in Havurah should get a Torah and a prayer book and learn to pray." Some criticism was even stronger. A rabbi wrote us a letter asserting that we were destructive because we had no rabbi at our helm.
In the beginning, the Beth Zion leadership expressed a worry that we would recruit from their membership. Some at our former temple were critical that we did not stay and seek a comprimise such as the assignment of a permanent rabbi who might better meet our needs.

As time passed, we were still seen by some as "far out" or "on the fringe", but as outsiders came to our services, to our Bat and Bar Mitzvahs, they came to admire and like what they found. They experienced the warmth and participation of our members. They began to appreciate our commitment. The Jewish Community

began to realize we were not a threat and as we began to join with other congregations through co-sponsored events and educational activities, the fear dissolved. The Jewish Community realized we had a great deal to contribute. In fact, today we serve as leaders of Buffalo's Jewish Community in numbers disproportionate to Havurah's size.

In a quarter century, we have grown increasingly more respected and even copied. Locally, other congregations have formed a Havurah or hosted a Rosh Hashanah Retreat, developments which also mirror national trends to permit interest groups to function within a larger congregation and to hold High Holy Day Services at non-traditional locations.

The "experiment" seemed to be working. Gradually, as the wonder at our existence began to pass, we realized that we had not merely survived, we were flourishing! And while we did not fear extinction—*Havurah should exist only so long as it effectively meets the needs of its members*—the realization struck us that Havurah's continued evolution depended upon permitting change which reflects the individuals within the group.

Part of that change could be found in our relationship with ritual. Because we wrote our own services, we had the opportunity to create rituals which represented a spectrum of philosophies in a religion that has never been monolithic. "A generation can only receive the teachings in the sense that it renews them." wrote Martin Buber. In our acceptance of a range of ideas, we created new Jewish ways of praying such as sevices written and led by members, the Rosh Hashanah Retreat and planting trees at Sukkot.

As time passed, a gradual change in the way we worshipped took place. Initially, we saw full expression of a particular ideological preference which corresponded to particular individuals writing a service. Today, there is a tendency for services to incorporate and accommodate all viewpoints. In the beginning, our writing was unsophisticated—we threw in a little of this, a little of that. At first our services leaned toward Humanism, with hardly a word about God. Now they include more Hebrew and increased levels of Jewish content and ritual. Over the years some of us have found that we actually desire more tradition, that the opportunity to experiment and reject certain practices in the past has allowed us to "reclaim" them again.

Change

For a few of us, the experiment did *not* work. Some could not clear the hurdles of non-traditional services and the absence of a professional clergy. In addition, our tendency to gather around those who jump right in, may have caused us to over-

look the more reserved members. Although it is unrealistic to bring everyone into the core of the congregation, we may have allowed some needy souls to drift away due to our inability to reach out to them. For those who did not find fulfillment, some have left; others have found that a dual membership at Havurah and a second synagogue has created for them a better mix of comfort and custom. We have come to terms with the fact that not every member can find satisfaction at Havurah. Further, we have accepted the notion that Havurah will not remain static, that just as we have changed as individuals, just as we lose parents and gain grandchildren, the congregation, too, must follow a natural progression: some will leave, others will join, and we will absorb and reflect the change.

In the beginning Havurah was a uniform collection, for the most part, of affluent nuclear families. Today we are heterogeneous, less upper middle-class. We are still young families with children, but we are also gay couples and singles; we are seniors and inter-faith marriages.

As current as we may appear, we are more accurately understood as a creative expression of our essential past. We seem always to return to the principles of tolerance and understanding for all points of view in an attempt to continue to serve our purpose. We strive to remain fluid, dynamic, a useful tool for individuals, rather than an institution which dictates religion. Are we now Humanist? Reformed? Polydox? It is much less critical today to define ourselves than, simply, to be together. Even after 25 years one of the strongest elements that seems to hold the congregation in place is our sense of community, a togetherness we now find through home dinners and services and each September at Reatreat.

For many of us, our involvement has decreased through the years. While we have remained spiritually attached to Havurah, some of us found that we have less time to participate. Our families, professional lives and community commitments have become too demanding. With so many activities competing for time, life, for many of us, is more programmed today than ever before. For others, we simply feel tired, needing to relinquish responsibility for Havurah activities. As the congregation began to grow, we were lucky to find talented newcomers to pick up the slack.

For many, when our children grew up and moved away, a transition occured. As young couples with kids, our intensity had burned bright; as we aged and our children moved away, our level of participation declined. Holidays, perhaps, now seem less meaningful without the presence of our children and grandchildren. Involvement changed for others as our services became more traditional and education groups seemed directed toward Judaic studies and Hebrew.

As Havurah grew up, as we grew in size and stability, we may have lost a certain amount of camaraderie and intimacy. To some of us, the founding spirit of cooperation has dissipated. There seems to be less togetherness as many members do not routinely attend events. While participation is high in our Sunday School, there is less emphasis on social action and experiential learning for adults. There is less participation in actually creating services and there is a perceived philosophical shift to the right.

Initially we "founders" did everything ourselves. At the time we possessed an attitude that *everything depended on us*. To this day, we still possess a sense of ownership. But in recent years, many have joined Havurah without the "survival instinct" which arose out of necessity for the older generation. Newer members among us do not look to Havurah to fill social needs. We utilize the congregation for specific features such as services, life cycle ceremonies and Sunday School. Do we now exist as two separate groups: Those with young children and those with young *grandchildren*? As we change, it is natural to mourn the loss of what once was. Yet we bear in mind that it may be healthy to recreate and re-identify ourselves as we grow. We realize that what may be an inevitable tension between old and new may nourish our revolution. We remain aware that, since our inception, Havurah has always faced new requirements from an evolving membership.

At the same time, we recognize with admiration the intensity and real devotion with which our founding members made Havurah work: the energy level; the days spent working on a service. We were doing it for ourselves, but also as a foundation for the congregation. We were trying to build something that went beyond our own sense of comfort—something for our kids and our grandkids, too. We made Judaism important.

At 25 Years

When we consider the milestones and events that comprise Havurah's quarter century, when we access the images from collective memory, we recall those seminal meetings which made possible the daunting prospect of creating our own congregation. We remember those first Bar Mitzvahs, the initial services and Retreats, the Havurah Singing Society. We think back to the opening of our Sunday School and the trips to New York. . . .To our decision to fund children for Reform summer camp. . . . And our decision *not* to move our place of worship. . . . We recall our past officer and their selfless dedication. . . . The countless committees and thankless tasks. . . . The knowledge we took from discussion groups. . . . The gratification we found in community service.

We look back with pride on our collective Bar Mitzvah—Havurah turning 13. And now at 25, graced by the membership of 100 families through the years, we reflect most of all on the friendship and community that has nourished us. One of us who left Buffalo years ago writes:

When I recently received a mailing from Havurah, my first name was written on the top. I don't know why, but I found this touching. As an adult, I have lived in six different states, eight different cities and at 12 different addresses. The simple sight of my first name on that piece of paper made me feel like I was still part of the Congregation. It made me feel like I had a home at Havurah.

The Havurah Experience . . .

The happy sight of one member's child seated on another member's lap.
From arguing and laughing.
From sleeping in tents at Lakeland.
From mini-dinners that capture our essence
regardless of who attends, what is served, or the content of the service.
From the support we muster when others encounter death and hardship.
From phone calls and concern and the unforgettable love we feel
in our time of loss.
Loss which shakes us all and love which brings us together like a family.
We remember sharing our joy with each other.
Ten pounds of chopped liver for a Bar Mitzvah.
The Havurah Olympics.
The coming of age of our sons and daughters, their weddings and their children.
Celebrations that would be incomplete without our Havurah family.
The music and laughter.
Flutes and pianos, cellos and guitars.
Hilarious songs.
Kids blowing the Shofar.
A Retreat when our children stood to sing and play guitar
And tell us what Havurah meant to them.

"A Time To Be Born . . ."

A scholar writes that "our race develops its human qualities in essence only from face to face, from heart to heart. It can do this only in small circles which gradually grow larger in the warmth of feeling and love, and in trust and confidance."

At 25, Havurah is an ever widening circle that connects us, from family to family, parent to child, temple founder to the newest member among us. It extends to those who have left town; it reaches to those who have passed away. And we hope, but do not insist, that it will touch those not yet born, so that they, too, may find something personal and intimate in Judaism. Something important and alive.

Casting our bread . . .