



***Am Yisrael Chai!* The Jewish People Lives!**

We've all heard the phrase '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' proclaimed with great joy and pride throughout our lives. In this month's column, I'd like to reflect a bit on how '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' translates to our beloved B'nai Jacob community.

Every time we gather for Shabbat services, '*Am Yisrael Chai!*'. Every time we come together in prayer for the High Holy Days and Festivals, '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' And every time we come together to be silly and dress up like a cow or a Chassid from Berdichev or Vashti and Esther or wear nutty costumes with boa feathers and baseball caps and listen to Megillat Esther chanted for Purim and shake groggers when Haman's name is pronounced, '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' Every time we come to shul to recite *Kaddish* and commemorate a *yarzeit* for a beloved parent, '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' or recite a *Misheberach* for those in need of *Refuah Sheleymah* and every time we give *Tzedakah*, *Am Yisrael Chai!* And when we came together as community on November 22nd for our 50th Anniversary Celebration Kick-off Gala that was truly, '*Am Yisrael Chai!*'

Every expression of our togetherness, our commitment and our caring about our Jewish community is a vote for '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' Any occasion, within or without the synagogue, where Jews are gathered to celebrate, commemorate or consider the essence of our Jewish identity, we are indeed making a statement that the Jewish People Lives!

For centuries our rituals and traditions – *minhagim* – have kept us together as a united Jewish nation. This past week, at the City University of New York Graduate Center' Center for Jewish Studies, I organized and moderated a fascinating and groundbreaking symposium and concert entitled, "Beyond Boundaries: Klezmer Music in the 21st Century." This event is part of an ongoing series I established last spring. The event last spring was entitled, "Beyond Boundaries: Music and Israel @ 60." These free public programs feature distinguished scholars, performers, composers, cultural mediators and commentators. The Beyond Boundaries Series is a part of my mission to establish a world-class Initiative in Jewish Music Research and Performance that doesn't exist in the western hemisphere. It's an ambitious undertaking, but one I feel is strategic with respect to Jewish continuity and our efforts to be able to say '*Am Yisrael Chai!*' over the course of

the 21st century and beyond.

Many Jews today do not find the synagogue their only source of opportunity to identify as a Jew. The preponderance of JCC's in America attests to that. Aspects of Jewish culture – music, art, theatre, museums, etc. – all serve as crucial catalysts in enforcing our collective identity as Jews. Our newer Jewish friends moving into the Jersey City areas downtown and in the Heights, as well as Society Hill and Port Liberte, may identify with these cultural assets of our Jewish community. We have a strategic opportunity to bring those cultural assets into B'nai Jacob whenever possible.

To that end, on February 8th, Sunday afternoon, in the sanctuary of B'nai Jacob, I will be co-directing with the Artistic Director of the Actors Shakespeare Company in residence at New Jersey City University, a Podium Reading of the landmark Jewish-American play, "The Jewish King Lear" by Jacob Gordin, written in 1892. This play marked a watershed moment in the development of Yiddish theatre in America and under the guidance of the renowned actor-director, Jacob Adler, it enjoyed many decades of success on the New York stage and elsewhere across the country. It even was made into a movie in the 1930s and is available today with English subtitles.

The reading of "The Jewish King Lear" on February 8 will be in the new English translation by Ruth Gay and can be enjoyed by everyone of all ages. The play tells the story of a family patriarch in Vilna and what happens when he divides his assets among his three daughters. There are references to Shakespeare's 'King Lear,' but the play is definitely a play about Eastern European Jewry at the end of the nineteenth century. Before the play begins, I will give a brief lecture – Bard Banter – about the history of Yiddish Theatre in America. I hope to see you all there.

I wish all of you a very Happy Hanukkah and happy new year. By coming to the event at B'nai Jacob on Sunday, February 8th, you'll have another opportunity to be part of B'nai Jacob's contribution to "*Am Yisrael Chai!*"

Cantor Marsha Dubrow

cantor@bnaijacobjc.org

201-910-4334

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