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LONG ISLAND Jewish World

Vol. 35 #24 June 23-29, 2006 • 27 Sivan - 3 Tammuz 5766

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Hamptons Happenings

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach's summer in Sag Harbor

She is the spiritual leader of the Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons, but there's nothing conservative about Rabbi Jan Uhrbach. While she embraces the tenets of her movement and has a deep respect for halacha (Jewish law), her approach to Judaism is passionate, contemporary



Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

and forward-looking.

The program she has planned for her summer in the Hamptons is a blend of tradition and innovation. Believing that "Judaism is not only for the synagogue," Uhrbach has opened her home to her congregants as well as to those not affiliated with her synagogue for Shabbat dinners every other Friday night. And if you think those evenings are anything like the traditional "Reb's Tisch" you may have experienced or heard about,

with a songfest in which the entire company participated. We sang songs in Hebrew, English and a number of other languages, and generally had a fun time. Once we exhausted our repertoire, it was time for grace after meals and the homeward drive.

Music will be a special highlight on the weekend of July 7-8, when Danny Maseng, a well-known singer/songwriter and storyteller, will be featured. He will participate in the Friday-night dinner at the rabbi's home, and on Saturday night he will conduct a *kum-sitz* or Jewish songfest.

Uhrbach will also offer a number of educational programs "designed to make prayer more meaningful and to help people understand what it means to pray and how to distinguish prayer from mere liturgy."

The study sessions begin on Thursday, July 13, and continue for seven consecutive Thursday evenings. The first part of the program will last three weeks and be devoted to an in-depth examination of Rebecca. The second part of the program begins on Aug. 10 and will be devoted to the Jewish holiday cycle. "We shall study the holidays in sequence and discover how they are related to one another," said Uhrbach.

forget about it!

Uhrbach will spend this summer in a modern, unpretentious waterfront home in Sag Harbor. Our Friday evening at her home began with Kabbalat Shabbat services on her deck overlooking Sag Harbor Cove. About 18 of us sat in a circle as the rabbi began the service with a soft, traditional melody. She encouraged us to join in as we let go of the stresses of the past week and invited the spirit of Shabbat peace to envelop us. It was a magical experience, heightened by the setting sun and the gentle lapping of the waves.

The rabbi grew up playing the violin and still has a great interest in music. This is evident in the melodies she selects for her services, which, she says, must "reflect the meaning of the prayer and should convey a sense of the harmony and peace of Shabbat."

Upon completion of the service, we took our places at a festive Shabbat table and pronounced the appropriate blessings before beginning the traditional meal. In keeping with her passion for Torah study, Uhrbach shared a *midrash* or two during the meal. Then, as dessert was served, gears were shifted and party-time began

From Monday, Aug. 7, through Thursday, Aug. 10, Uhrbach will present an intensive course in the structure of the synagogue service. Classes will be held from 9 a.m. until noon, with the first hour devoted to learning basic prayer Hebrew and the balance of the time to helping students "satisfy their hunger for a deeper prayer experience."

For the three Saturday evenings immediately before Rosh Hashanah, Uhrbach will conduct sunset "Havdalah" services followed by a festive dinner. Additionally, the congregation is planning a number of other summer programs, possibly including a movie night and a book group. On the social-action front, it has made a commitment to help the East Hampton Summer School Lunch Program and is an active participant in the food drive for the Sag Harbor Food Pantry.

—Peter I. Rothholz

The Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons conducts Shabbat morning services at the Whalers Church in Sag Harbor. For information about services, Shabbat dinners, classes and other programs, call (631) 725-8188