

# The Charlotte JEWISH news

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## Returning to Our Roots Garden in Shalom Park Will Both Educate and Feed

By Amy Krakovitz

As Jews, we often think of ourselves as denizens of the city. We pursue professional careers that place us in office buildings, hospitals, courthouses, and stores. Rarely do we see ourselves as farmers. And if we consider ourselves gardeners, it is a hobby rather than a vocation.

But that hasn't always been the case. Even from the very beginning, we were called upon to care for the earth. "God told Adam that he was to be a steward of the planet," Temple Israel's Rabbi Noam Raucher says. "Being the earth's master is more than just tilling it, it is also tending it. It's a great responsibility."

This was a responsibility our ancestors had to take seriously, as agriculture was their way of life. Holidays were planned around the planting and reaping seasons; sacrifices brought to the Temple were taken from harvests and livestock. Even after the destruction of the Temple, the scattered Jews continued to grow food for themselves and others. Rashi was well known as a vintner who produced kosher wines, though continued connection to the land became difficult in the Middle Ages, as Jews were not allowed to own land and leasing land was often cost prohibitive.

Even in Eastern Europe, only a few countries allowed Jews to cross over into the farmer class (from "Jewish Life in Bessarabia"

by Yefim Kogan, Hebrew College, 2012). In most shtetls, Jews were the merchants and craftsmen and they traded their wares and goods with the local Gentile farmers for food (from "Shtetl" by Samuel Kassow, YIVO Institute). Here is where our severance from the land began and we started to consider ourselves strictly urban creatures.

When millions of Jews immigrated to the US in the 19th century, one rabbi was inspired to reignite a return to the land. Joseph Krauskopf created the National Farm School in Doylestown, PA, in 1896 to teach Jewish immigrants how to live off and make a living from the land. That school still exists today as Delaware Valley University.

The most conspicuous connection to the land in the 20th century was the Kibbutz movement in Palestine and then Israel. Zionists came to Eretz Yisrael and, starting in 1909, created communal farms with the intention of "making the desert bloom." According to the Jewish Virtual Library: "Their path was not easy: a hostile environment, inexperience with physical labor, a lack of agricultural know-how, desolate land neglected for centuries, scarcity of water, and a shortage of funds were among the difficulties confronting them." But the desert did indeed bloom and Israel has become one the most innovative

source of agricultural advancements in the world.

Here in the US the Local Food and Farm-to-Table movements have precipitated Jewish organizations for farming and gardening. Just googling the phrase "Jewish Farm to Table" yields a myriad of organizations: Adamah, the Teva Center, Jewish Farm School, Kahn's Garden in Asheville, and The Pearlstone Center in Maryland, among others.

As a part of the Environmental Initiative in Shalom Park, a garden is planned for both growing vegetables and educating the constituents about sustainability, agriculture, and our deep connection to the earth.

"We have three missions for our garden," says Raucher, who leads the educational efforts with Rabbi Jonathan Freirich of Temple Beth El. "We want it to be accessible: everyone can come and participate. We want it to be sustainable: the food can continuously be planted and harvested. We want it to be educational: we will teach Jewish values through



Kahn's Garden at the Asheville Jewish Community Center.

gardening.

"We want our community to develop a relationship with the earth, learning how to maintain it, respect it, and sustain it."

Not only will there be food planted and harvested, the garden "must also appear beautiful. There is an aesthetic that we want to achieve," continues Raucher.

All the organizations and schools on the park will have access to the garden and the educational programs planned by the rabbis.

The products of the garden may be donated to Jewish Family Services or local food banks or local "food deserts," where residents do not have access to fresh food markets. Or the harvest could be sold and the proceeds donated to any of the above. But the garden will be planted, nurtured, and harvested by our community, increasing their connection to the planet and their understanding of Tikkun Olam. "We won't just have irrigation," jokes Freirich, "we will have prayer-irrigation."

The garden's location has yet to be determined, but the committee is looking for an area within the park that is accessible, large, and shared by all the organizations.

"It's not enough to teach about our requirements to be good stewards of the world," concludes Freirich. "We have to be examples. We have to be the [solar-powered] light to the nations."

If you are interested in helping out on the garden committee, please contact the Environmental Initiative Project Manager, Lisa Garfinkle, at [environmental@shalomcharlotte.org](mailto:environmental@shalomcharlotte.org). ✨

## Tikkun Leil Shavuot Community Late Night Discussion to Commemorate Shavuot

By Rabbi Noam Raucher and Rabbi Jonathan Freirich

It is hard not to talk about Israel lately. Almost without a beat we see Israel in the headlines as top news stories or stories of interest. Pick your topic: Israel's security, its relationship with the United States as an ally, Bibi and Obama's relationship with each other, Jewish-U.S support for Israel (or lack thereof), Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), Iran as a nuclear power, the Palestinian question, or even questions about Israel's internal climate - it is hard to recall a day lately that we did not hear about Israel. And that's just the dramatic stuff.

Our community expresses its deep connection to Israel in beautiful ways. Attend any of our Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day) and/or Yom HaZikaron (Memorial Day) events and you will see what it means to love Israel. But when Israel is in the news we find ourselves talking more and more about it. As passions rise it is possible that you have found yourself in at least one conversation turned debate without even knowing it. Individual and small group conversations about Israel take place on a regular basis. But how often do we get together to talk about Israel on a community-wide level?

Rabbi Jonathan Freirich and Rabbi Noam Raucher share a vision of our community, the greater Charlotte Jewish community, in dialogue about one of Judaism's most pressing topics. Imagine, late in a springtime evening, as Shabbat is dwindling into the night, a room full of your friends and family members listening to thought provoking conversations about Israel and Zionism. (Perhaps even with some

nosh and coffee in hand). What an opportunity it would be to get to know one another through honest and respectful conversations. Imagine what you could learn about yourself, and our fellow community members. Imagine how much more we would understand about one another.

Saturday evening, May 23, brings with it Shavuot, and opportunity for us to talk about Israel with depth and honesty. Rabbinic legend teaches us that the newly liberated Israelites slept late on the day that God gave them the Ten Commandments and a covenant to enter - the moments that Shavuot

(Continued on page 2)

**What is Zionism, and are Jews Obligated to be Zionists?**

**Saturday, May 23  
Lerner Hall, Levine JCC**

**8 PM - Panel Conversation with Rabbis  
Murray Ezring, Judy Schindler, and  
Barbara Thiede  
Coffee and nosh served**

**9 PM - First round breakout sessions  
(Taught by local rabbis and educators)**

**10 PM - Second round of breakout  
sessions  
(Taught by local rabbis and educators)**

**1 PM- Ice cream dessert**

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