



# SCROLL

## THE NEWSLETTER OF JCP'S CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE

**In This Edition – Jan. 13, 2014**

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### **This Week**

#### **Soul Food**

Monday, January 13  
8:00 PM

#### **Shabbat Shindig**

for kids in K, 1st, and 2nd grades  
Saturday, January 18  
10:00 AM

#### **Tot Shabbat**

Saturday, January 18  
10:00 AM

Join together for a kiddush sponsored by the Sidikaro family in honor of Talia's 4th birthday.

**TOT SHABBAT**  
Saturday, Jan. 18 • 10–11 AM  
JCP, 146 Duane St  
For families with children up to five years of age, free of charge.

Tot Shabbat is a joyful, musical, story-filled Shabbat morning experience geared towards families with young children. The monthly program is led by Jacob Steitl who, along with his puppets, will guide us through a celebration of Shabbat.  
Bring your family and friends to celebrate. Stay for grape juice and challah in the JCP café.

**FUTURE TOT SHABBAT DATES FOR 2013 – 2014**  
February 3, March 7, April 1, and May 18

For more information and to RSVP for this event, please email [ajl@aec@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:ajl@aec@jcpdowntown.org) or call 312.334.5532.

Dear Friends,

The Torah portion we read this coming Shabbat is called Yitro. Yitro—which became “Jethro” in English—is the name of Moses’ father-in-law. Yitro helps Moses to create a system of governance among the Israelites once they leave Egypt and begin traveling together in the desert.

In this week’s portion, the Israelites are encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses ascends to the top of the mountain where he will receive *aseret ha’dibrot*, the Ten Commandments. A better translation of the Hebrew is “the Ten Utterances;” if you carefully read [the text](#) you will find more than ten commandments within these ten statements. Why are they called *dibrot*, “utterances?” Some Jewish traditions say that these were the commandments spoken directly by God to the people, so even though they are among many other commandments [see “Ask the Rabbi” below], they are extra special because of the context in which they were transmitted and received.

This week and weekend are also accompanied by other Jewish and secular festivals. Thursday is Tu B’shevat—the Jewish new year of trees, the time of year in the land of Israel when the first blooms of the trees are showing. Here in New York, it’s a great time to plant some parsley [inside!], which may be ready to eat by Passover. This weekend is also the eve of our celebration the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. With the Exodus story ringing in our ears, Dr. King’s message carries an additional note of meaning for us: [“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”](#) As our ancient story moves from slavery to Mount Sinai, these “Ten Commandments” help us set the groundwork of a just society.

Best wishes for a wonderful week.

Warmly,

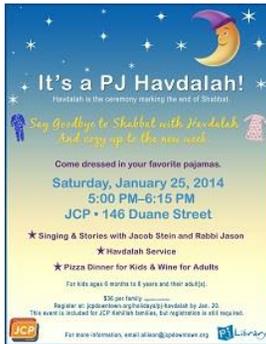


Rabbi Jason Klein  
Director, Center for Jewish Life  
[rabbijason@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:rabbijason@jcpdowntown.org)

Take advantage of the early registration rate and sign up by January 17 for **Saturday Night Recess.**



**Register now for PJ Havdalah!**



**New Adult Class with Rabbi Jason  
All About Judaism—Begins Feb. 11**



**Upcoming Events**  
January 13–February 7

Monday, Jan 13, 8:00 PM  
[Soul Food with Rabbi Elianna](#)

**[Ask Rabbi Jason](#)**

**Q. What does “mitzvah” really mean?**

A. From Detective John Munch’s script in the inaugural season of NBC’s “Law and Order SVU” over 14 years ago, through Patti Stanger’s blunt style in Bravo’s “Millionaire Matchmaker,” the word “mitzvah” might be among the more popular words that have migrated from Jewish culture into American parlance.

Even though the Hebrew word mitzvah [accent on the second syllable in contemporary spoken Hebrew] means ‘commandment,’ the pronunciation mitzvah [accent on the first syllable] is commonly used to mean a good deed. This is likely because the word has had this implication in Yiddish, and many of the Hebrew words that have come into English have done so through Yiddish [chutzpah and maven are other examples]. Bar or Bat Mitzvah literally means ‘son or daughter of commandment.’ It is the expression that has come to mean “age of responsibility” which is how we welcome our children into young adulthood; children take on more responsibility for their own actions at the age of majority.

The plural of the word mitzvah is mitzvot, and it is said that the Torah contains 613 mitzvot, 613 commandments. There are several different ways in which mitzvot are commonly categorized in Jewish tradition. Among them are:

Mitzvot between a person and God  
vs. mitzvot between a person and another person.

Mitzvot for which the reasoning behind them is clear  
vs. mitzvot for which the reasoning behind them is mysterious.

Mitzvot that can happen any place or any time  
vs. mitzvot that are linked to a particular place and or a particular time.

Mitzvot that are derived from interpretations of the Torah text itself  
vs. mitzvot that are codified by the early rabbis in the Talmud.

Mitzvot that are “do’s”  
vs. mitzvot that are “don’t do’s.”

One of my favorite interpretations is based on that final categorization, which is that 248 mitzvot are positive [do this!] commandments and 365 are negative [don’t do this!] commandments. Since there is a tradition that there are 248 parts of the human body, then the total number of 613 is achieved by saying that all [248 parts] of me will observe mitzvot all [365 days] of the year.

The reality is that many commandments were linked to other

Saturday, Jan 18, 10:00 AM  
[Shabbat Shindig](#)

Saturday, Jan 18, 10:00 AM  
[Tot Shabbat](#)

Friday, Jan 24, 6:00 PM  
[Friday Night Lights:](#)  
[HSP & Community Youth](#)

Saturday, Jan 25, 5:00 PM  
[PJ Havdalah](#)

Sunday, Jan 26, 2:30 PM  
[Tzedakah Sunday](#)

Friday, Jan 31, 6:00 PM  
[Friday Night Lights: All Ages](#)

Saturday, February 1, 5:30 PM  
[Saturday Night Recess](#)

Friday, February 7, evening  
[Sweet Home Shabbat](#)

For the JCP Center for Jewish Life  
2013–2014 calendar, please [click here](#).

periods in Jewish history, so it's impossible to observe all 613 commandments today. Nevertheless, I think the arithmetic above [248+365=613] reminds us of the unity between what we do and who we are.

To submit your question to Rabbi Jason, please [click here](#).

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### [Featured Photo](#)

#### **Enjoying the JCP Hanukkah Bash December 8, 2013**



[Click here to view hundreds of photos taken at our JCP events over the last few months!](#)

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### [A Note from ECC](#)

**Register for the [Tu B'Shvat Holiday Workshop](#) on  
Wednesday, January 15th, from 4:30–5:30 PM  
at JCP, 146 Duane Street.**

Join us for a fun, educational, and experiential hands-on workshop exploring Tu B'Shvat. This program will be for children ages 3–5 years old.

To register, please contact [rachel@jcpdowntown.org](mailto:rachel@jcpdowntown.org).

