

HIAS Refugee Weekend at Congregation Beth El, Sudbury, MA

Congregation Beth El celebrated the HIAS Refugee Weekend with two exciting events. On Saturday evening, February 3, following *Havdalah* (end of Sabbath) led by Rabbi Joshua Breindel, cabaret singer extraordinaire Belle Linda Halpern entertained a lively crowd, performing “*Songs of Love & Social Consciousness*,” a tribute to the late Martha Schlamme, a singer/activist who would have been 100 years old this year. Belle Linda had studied under Martha, and honored her teacher, performing some of the songs that Martha had made famous. Accompanied by pianist Ron Roy, Belle Linda sang a repertoire, mesmerizing the audience with favorites by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, Jacques Brel, and Gershwin/Hammerstein. A Yiddish folk song and a Nigerian Freedom song featured audience participation as well. A wonderful array of desserts added to the festive evening, and all proceeds from this event go to HIAS, originally called the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. Over 100 years ago, HIAS was founded to assist Jewish immigrants coming to America. Their work continues, worldwide today, assisting immigrants of all ethnicities, religions, and nationalities.

On Sunday afternoon, continuing the celebration of HIAS, the Beth El Sanctuary Committee hosted a Coffee House, featuring eight speakers who shared personal stories under the title, “A Time When I Took a Stand / A Time When I Stood Up.” Speakers included Elaine Barnartt Goldstein, Michael Jacoby Brown, Bernard Horn, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Diego Low, Carl Offner, Ira Silver, and Roberta Unger.

Additionally, Beth El’s choral group, “Shir El,” conducted by Cantor Vera Broekhuysen, sang “*Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor*,” a beautiful song featuring lyrics by Emma Lazarus and music by Irving Berlin. These same lyrics are famously etched into the base of the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. A sumptuous buffet of foods and beverages completed a lovely afternoon of community and purpose.