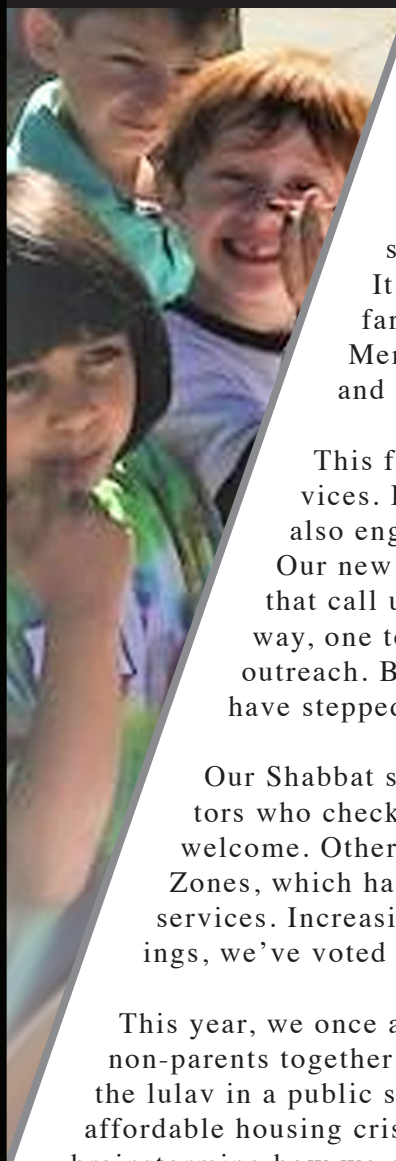




The Jewish *Gaily Forward*

"Transcend the Ordinary"

Kislev - Adar 5778 / December 2017 - February 2018



A Message From Our President

By MICHAEL CHERTOK

Chanukah is our holiday of rededication. I am so proud to be president of Sha'ar Zahav at a time when so many of us have rededicated ourselves to building a community that affirms the sacred in every one of us. It is so exciting as we mark 40 years as a community! We have come so far since a small band of mostly gay men gathered in the basement of Glide Memorial Church in the summer of 1977. Today, we are a diverse, growing and thriving congregation with so much positive energy.

This fall, we packed the Herbst Theatre for our inspiring High Holy Day services. In case you missed the action downstairs, our children's' services were also engaging – and overflowing with kids, parents and wonderful energy. Our new rabbi, Mychal Copeland, has been leading us with meaningful sermons that call us to action. In response, two new social action programs are under way, one to support immigrants and refugees, the other focused on multi-faith outreach. Both initiatives are driven by congregants new to our community who have stepped into leadership roles.

Our Shabbat services on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings are attracting visitors who check us out, are inspired by our liturgy, and appreciate the warmth of our welcome. Others are joining us for Tot Shabbat with our favorite song leader, Isaac Zones, which happens on the second Friday of the month, and includes dinner after services. Increasingly they are saying yes to membership. At our last few board meetings, we've voted in record numbers of new members.

This year, we once again celebrated Sukkot in Dolores Park with children, parents and non-parents together enjoying the experience of eating outdoors in the sukkah and shaking the lulav in a public setting. Others gathered in a sukkah in a member's home to discuss the affordable housing crisis in the Bay Area, intimately sharing our personal experiences – and brainstorming how we can support members of our community facing housing challenges. We ended this festival with a lively celebration of Simchat Torah, filled with joyful music and dancing to end the Torah cycle and begin anew. These diverse expressions of Judaism and spirituality are what make our community so special.

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The Winter Holiday Dilemma

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND



When I was growing up, my parents threw the most elegant Chanukah parties. My mom, a decorator, relished the opportunity to throw a party with pizzazz. Down the bannister streamed a garland – some years a deep green theme with flowers or elegant dreidels, other years covered in white like

the snow we would never see in Southern California. Year after year, barely observant relatives and our synagogue's rabbi criticized her elaborate decorations as too Christmassy.

For her critics, Christmas was perhaps an annual symbol of how our tiny Jewish minority is threatened by a dominant Christian culture, and my mom was blurring that line. Maybe attending this Chanukah party fulfilled their need to be in a distinctly Jewish place during the onslaught of the Christmas commercial season.

Jews often become confused at this time of year about how to approach Christmas as it morphs from a religious holiday into an American cultural festival. In the words of Jewish philosopher

Mordecai Kaplan, how do we live as members of two civilizations – both Jewish and American? The figure of Joseph from our Torah readings this month reminds us that this confusion is nothing new.

The shapers of our tradition vigorously debated just how assimilated the exiled Joseph had become after being brought to Egypt, and have long employed his struggles as a Jew in a non-Jewish place to help us navigate similar realities in different historical contexts. Joseph traded his garb for Egyptian clothing, changed his name and went to work for Pharaoh. But the early rabbis, worried about the message this would send to their own diaspora community, asserted that no one of that generation changed their names, and that Joseph never forgot his Hebrew.

As we stand in line at Starbucks this season, debating how we feel about whatever holiday wishes they place on their cups, we might remember that as American Jews and those connected to Jews, this tension is part of being Jewish. Like Joseph, we will continue the dance of living in two (or, perhaps, more) civilizations. And we will proudly bring our particularities to the table while ensuring that other minority traditions are not overshadowed or discriminated against as they are celebrated.

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Seeds of Light

By CANTOR SHARON BERNSTEIN



Or zarua la-tzadik,
u-l'yishrei lev simcha:
Light is sown in those
who are righteous, and
joy planted in those
who are straightfor-
ward in their hearts.
~ Psalms 97:11

Imagine little seeds of
light, fluttering down,
nestling into each of
us, into every life on
the planet. Imagine

those seeds growing, flourishing, spreading
light inside and outside. Imagine the world
filled with light.

Imagine also that we don't have to wait for
those seeds – that we can create and plant
them anywhere and everywhere we like – in
ourselves, in others, in the world. It's not
always easy to see light, to bring it forth, par-
ticularly when times are difficult, when the
world seems dark.

The Zohar (a book of Jewish mystical teach-
ings) says that each of us has a spark given
to us at birth, an individualized expression of
the divine. That spark, that light, exists in us
at all times, but sometimes we're not connect-

ed with it. Sometimes it needs a little attention,
a little nourishing, to bring it forth.

There's not a lot of time in our world for spark-
nourishing; it tends to fall by the wayside in
the face of pressures such as keeping up with
email, brushing our teeth and doing the dishes.

But that being said, the spark is there, and
sometimes it's enough just to know that it's
there, to remind ourselves of its existence, for
it to start sending out more light.

We can also nourish it through our words, our
thoughts, our intentions. As the Hassidic Mas-
ter Dov Ber of Mezeritch said, "Place all your
thoughts into the power of your words, until
you see the light of the words. You can then
see how one word shines into another, and how
many lights are brought forth in their midst."

Perhaps best of all, we can nourish other peo-
ples' seeds as well. Light abounds when we
give a kind word, let someone go in front of us
in line, or show up where there's need.

**Cantor Bernstein leads us with music and
new tunes at Shabbat services on the third
Friday of each month.**

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Making Judaism Relevant In The Modern World

By LEEAHT SEGEV / Director of Education



I spent the whole night tossing and turning before finally realizing I had the back-to-school jitters.

No, I wasn't the student, but was probably more nervous than the students themselves!

It was the night before the launch of our new Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer (BSPM) religious school curriculum and I was having trouble sleeping. Was everything prepared, did I forget something, what about snacks, I bought snacks, right? I finally reassured myself that all was in place before finally drifting off for a few hours of slumber.

Our first day of school turned into a beautiful microcosm of my larger vision for the school. After opening circle (with our new rabbi), families joined their children to get a preview of how our school would run.

We looked together at three sayings from Pirkei Avot (a compilation of ethical writings), discussing in small groups how these ancient Jewish texts were still relevant to our lives today. Then we took what we discussed and, on a large piece of paper, each group drew what they felt their particular saying represented.

All three groups worked together to create one large code of ethics that represented how different aspects of Judaism and Jewish values work together in our lives.

Using texts as a springboard into experiential activities is going to be a core foundation for the school. Allowing kids to see firsthand the relevance of Judaism in the modern world is an important goal at BSPM.

We took that code of ethics to launch our first unit on Jewish Values. The children spent the next few weeks learning what Judaism has to say about the refugee crisis.

"Allowing kids to see firsthand the relevance of Judaism in the modern world is an important goal."

-Leeaht Segev

They proudly presented their findings and work during our first intergenerational day in mid-October. One group performed a play with a modern take on the story of Sarah and Abraham's tent. Another group of students will do a live podcast/filming with a local refugee.

We will also be making protest signs that will become a community resource for our members to use. This is a way of tying Judaism into our modern world, and our school to our larger Sha'ar Zahav community.

Welcome Rabbi Mychal Copeland as Sha'ar Zahav's new rabbi at her installation service on Friday, January 26, 7:30 pm. Watch your weekly email for more information.

Jill & Britta Pomrantz

By HEIDY ZOHAR RAMIREZ / Director of Engagement

In November 2015, Britta and Jill Pomrantz drove across the country with three dogs and two cats to find a home in Northern California. During their first year here, they joined us at Sha'ar Zahav for Kol Nidre, and were determined to make their way closer to the city and closer to a new Jewish community. Now they have accomplished both.

Jill is a veterinarian specializing in internal medicine. She is drawn to mission-driven work focused on animal welfare and cruelty prevention. Before relocating to the West Coast, Jill served as medical director of the ASPCA Animal Hospital in New York City. She is now an Internal Medicine Specialist at the San Francisco SPCA hospitals in Pacific Heights and the Mission.

Britta is what she calls a “reluctant attorney.” She served as an assistant district attorney in Manhattan for eight years, with a focus on appellate practice and domestic violence. Here in California, she works for the State Bar, prosecuting attorneys who commit ethical violations. It's a good fit for an attorney who doesn't necessarily love attorneys.

The two met online when Britta, after too many disaster dates, was about to give up on online dating altogether and Jill was “just looking.” They married in October 2015, drawn to one another by their shared love of animals, their musical backgrounds, a passion for running and the outdoors, and their often opposite, but complementary, personalities.



They also come from very different Jewish backgrounds: Jill was raised in a traditional conservative Jewish household; Britta came to Jewish learning and observance later in life, through her tiny and motley college chavurah. They are both thrilled to feel so at home at Sha'ar Zahav, and look forward to being a part of such a vibrant community.

Welcome Our New and Returning Members!

Ezrah Cohen-Wallach
Julia Weber & Charles Fineberg
Ellen Harrington & Katy Butler
Judith Cohen
Joseph Shapiro

Victoria Kromnick & Yuval Gnessin
Jill & Britta Pomrantz
Kaye Hoxter & Jodi Bando
Daryl Smith & Barbara Bergman
Adam Pollack

Sha'ar Zahav Memories

By ALLAN GOLD

I began my connection with Sha'ar Zahav in November 1978. Supervisor Harvey Milk had just been assassinated and I heard that there would be a memorial service by Sha'ar Zahav at the Women's Building. I had completed my PhD at UC Berkeley a month before and I was moving back to San Francisco. I was 32 and beginning to be ready to restructure my life and. I hoped to find a permanent relationship. I vaguely thought that Sha'ar Zahav might present some possibilities.

When I walked into the Women's Building, I saw two old friends, one from religious school at Congregation Emanu-El and one from my dorm at Berkeley. I had never even known or thought about their being gay. My overwhelming and cathartic experience that night was that there were lots of gay Jewish people. I wasn't unique, and this was the beginning of a healing and integration process for me. I finally began to be comfortable with myself as both gay and Jewish and was ready to move on with my life, instead of struggling so intensely with my identity.

I moved back to San Francisco and joined Sha'ar Zahav. At a friend's party, I met Paul Cohen, who became my first serious gay partner for the next five years. He was the first president of Sha'ar Zahav, and I was a treasurer, so I was definitely involved.

Over the years I built close friendships and had fun too. In the early 80s, my favorite experiences were the gay-themed Megillah Madness performances for Purim, including the 1986 performance Polyester where I played "Lolachai," a drag

version of Mordechai. There was method to this madness; the AIDS crisis first touched us in 1981 and our first member's death happened in 1982. The challenges became greater and greater as more members became sick and died. So it was even more important to find avenues for fun and enjoyment, while we were providing bikkor cholim (helping the sick) to our congregants.

In 1981, we joined the Reform movement and shortly afterwards hired Rabbi Yoel Kahn, and began working through the identity politics of a congregation based on sexual identity rather than neighborhood or type of Jewish practice. We welcomed and struggled with the integration of children and non-gay families into the congregation. We confronted sexism and the need to include other letters along with "G" and "L."

In 1991, at age 45, I realized that I was ready for the challenge of becoming president, and became the first president to serve for two years. Though working full time, I loved being president, working with the va'ad to understand and put into effect values-based decision-making, and trying to provide the moral leadership to get us through the AIDS crisis. During the first three months of my presidency, 13 congregants passed away. But together we were able to support each other. On a lighter note, I remember the weekly fun pushke pitches that I gave and my introduction of naming the colors of the weekly announcement hand-outs – a now longstanding silly tradition.

I owe many profound life experiences to Sha'ar Zahav. In 1993, my dear friend Nancy Meyer and her partner Marilyn O'Keeffe, z"l, had their son, Daniel. I was asked to be

his godfather, a gift that never would have happened without Sha'ar Zahav. After Marilyn passed away in 1997, I became even closer to Daniel and I feel like he has been the son that I never had. I will always remember speaking to him at his bar mitzvah, an opportunity which I had always envied parents, and never thought I would have. Over the years I have supported his growth, development and education.



One of my most wonderful life events at Sha'ar Zahav was my marriage to my husband, Alan Ferrara, in July 1999. We had a completely filled sanctuary, including my then 101-year-old father and all five of our godchildren. It was a Jewish experience we'll always cherish. Though we married legally at City Hall in 2008, we consider this our actual wedding date.

In October 2008, I started a monthly support group for gay dads. This has been one of the Sha'ar Zahav experiences of which I have been most proud. I have used my career and training as a school psychologist to counsel and support these wonderful dads, who clearly have done their utmost to be the best dads they can be, often under quite challenging circumstances. I have learned so much from them about raising adopted children and dealing with all of the normal and exceptional challenges of raising children. I have attended several b'nei mitzvah with pride and admiration for how far these children have come.

A recent event was also a great gift to me. In May, Irene Ogus and I were interviewed as part of the nascent Oral History Project initiated by 6th and 7th grade Beit Sefer students. It was wonderful to be able to share my personal experiences of growing up in San Francisco, going to college in the 60s at Berkeley, and discussing the early years of Sha'ar Zahav, the AIDS crisis, and Sha'ar Zahav's impact and meaning for us. To be recorded for posterity felt like a touch of immortality.

As I approach nearly 40 years of Sha'ar Zahav membership, I am eternally grateful for the opportunities to make lifelong friends, gain leadership skills, become a practicing Jew, and use my professional skills for both personal and organizational enhancement.

I will always be there for Sha'ar Zahav, so that it can continue to provide the religious home it has been for me for future generations.

Installation of Rabbi Mychal Copeland

FRIDAY EVENING, JANUARY 26TH, 2018

We are pleased to announce that **Rabbi Steven Carr-Reuben, Rabbi Emeritus of Kehillat Israel of Pacific Palisades**, has been invited to be the installing rabbi and speaker. He has been a mentor and spiritual guide to Rabbi Copeland.

Rabbi Carr-Reuben, an accomplished author and lecturer on moral education and the challenges of interfaith relationships, is the recipient of the Los Angeles community Micah Award as the founder of the largest full-service homeless shelter in Los Angeles County. Among his published works are *Raising Jewish Children in a Contemporary World* and *Making Interfaith Marriage Work*.

The service begins at 7:30 pm and will be followed by a festive and celebratory oneg.



Meet Our Administrator Sharon Heath

I was born in Oakland and mostly raised in Northern California, and am a life-long Giants fan.



I've been around Sha'ar Zahav for more than 25 years, as the partner (and now wife) of Lisa Katz, and also as a member of First Mennonite Church (which has rented space here for many years).

Our daughters, Miriam and Rose Katz, had their bat mitzvahs at CSZ, and Rose was a madricha for Beit Seifer.

I was a lawyer for 25 years until I "retired" to become a domestic administrator for 10 years. As the synagogue administrator, I have three main areas of responsibility: the building, finances and supporting other synagogue staff.

I make sure the building is clean, staffed and ready for services, work with groups and individuals who want to rent space in the building, make sure your donations are deposited and recorded correctly and thank-you letters and acknowledgments are sent on time, process payroll, and provide support for Heidi, Leeah, Cantor Bernstein and Rabbi Copeland as needed.

It's my job to see what needs to be done and get it taken care of-in short, I'm the Synagogue Mom!

Annie Atura & Tyler Bushnell on their marriage on September 3rd.
Adam Tetenbaum & Lowell Caulder on their marriage on October 9th.

SHA'AR ZAHAV SPONSORSHIPS

August 11-12:

Flowers by James Carlson,
 in memory of his mother,
 Jan Tuzzolino

Oneg by Guy Smith-Shimon,
 in honor of Robert Smith's
 welcoming into the covenant

August 18-19:

Oneg by Rabbi Valerie Joseph,
 in honor of Paul Cohen's birthday,
 Howard Steiermann,
 and Rabbi Mychal Copeland

August 25-26:

Oneg by Alice Harron,
 in memory of her mother,
 Bernice Kahn Harron

September 8-9:

Oneg by Diana Buchbinder,
 in memory of her father,
 Irving Robert Buchbinder

September 15-16:

Oneg by David Lowe,
 in memory of his husband,
 Daniel McGoldrick

October 13-14:

Flowers by Sara Wysocki,
 in memory of Sarah Kelly Beard

Oneg by Lisa Katz,
 in memory of her father,
 Norman Katz

October 27-28:

Flowers by Christine Young & David Gluck,
 in memory of David's father
 Moritz Gluck and sister Elizabeth Gluck

SHA'AR ZAHAV CONDOLENCES

August

Yetta Hauptman,
 mother of Steve Hauptman
 and grandmother of
 Zachariah Greer Hauptman
 Madelyn Wolfe,
 mother of Judith Wolfe

September

Benjamin Greenberg,
 father of Jim and father in law of Judith Bell
 Janice Hauptman,
 cousin of Steve Hauptman

September (cont.)

Dr. Mike Rankin,
 past president

October

Malik Bernstein, member,
 son of Ilana Bernstein & Diane Desmond
 and brother of Desmond, Anna
 and Chaltu Bernstein
 Lois Hirschfield,
 mother of Ira Hirschfield
 John Rubin,
 father in law of Adam Pollack

Your contributions help us realize our commitment to building and maintaining a vibrant, living community for Congregation Sha'ar Zahav. A donation can be a meaningful way to honor friends or family, engagements, anniversaries, graduations, for special thanks, or to memorialize a loved one. Collectively, with your financial support, we continue to prosper, grow, and celebrate our future.

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Allan Berenstein
 in memory of George Mintzer
 James Carlson
 in memory of Malik Bernstein

Chai Fund (Music)

Ami Zusman

(FROM THE COVER)

Our clergy team of Rabbi Copeland and Cantor Bernstein has been joined by our now regular administrator, Sharon Heath, our Engagement Director, Heidy Ramirez, and our Education Director, Leeaht Segev, to form a strong team in our office. They are busily meeting with members to understand how we can best support our community, channel new ideas into successful programming and make the best use of our building.

The generous outpouring of donations of goods and funds for those who have lost their homes in the recent fires is an example of our community at its best. Teaming up with San Francisco Hillel enabled the donations to reach those most in need quickly.

Many members and friends responded to our pre-High Holy Day requests to support our services at Herbst; this enabled us to forgo

fundraising appeals during services. I hope you enjoyed the stories of "Why Sha'ar Zahav," as told by our longtime and new members. If you missed some of them – or want to be re-inspired - their beautiful talks are on our website.

As many of you have heard me say, I see a key part of my role is to serve as Chief Thank You Officer. I so appreciate each of you who make up this fabulous community. We are weaving a close-knit and inviting community where everyone feels celebrated for who they are.

Together, we have changed the face of Judaism in the Bay Area with our commitment to inclusion, egalitarianism, innovative liturgy and social action. May we continue to celebrate!



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